ADWEEK

MARCH 2023

The New Consumer

CREATING INCLUSIVE MARKETING ACROSS RACE, AGE AND ABILITY

PLUS: Media Agency of the Year 2023 Winners

Making Advertising Accessible

KR LIU IS HELPING GOOGLE—AND THE ENTIRE INDUSTRY—GET SERIOUS ABOUT INCLUSION.

BY ROBERT KLARA

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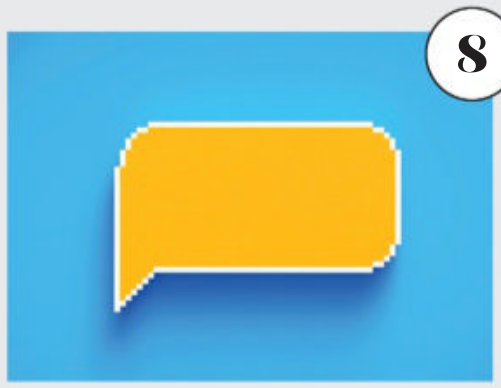
MEDIA AGENCY OF THE YEAR

The shops standing out as technology becomes the top differentiator.



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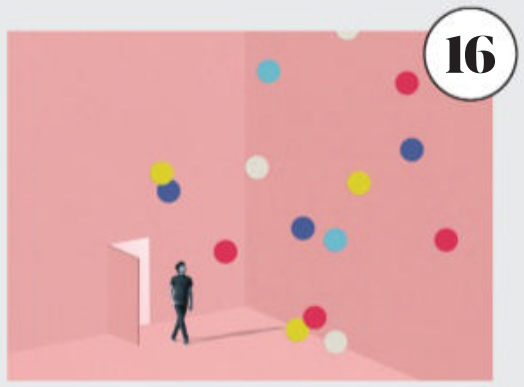
Brands have to walk a tightrope when courting **Generation Alpha**.



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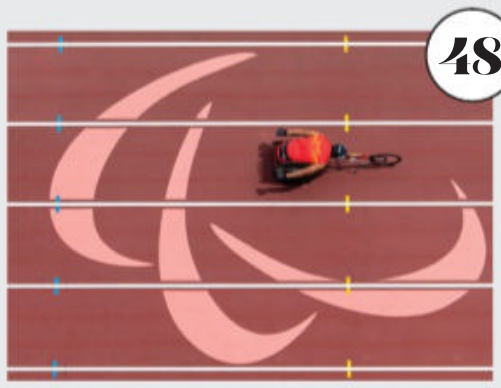

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From a wheelchair polo game to **the Paralympics**.

COVER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHONA KASINGER FOR ADWEEK

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Upfront

THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

EYE-TRACKING IS THE NEW HOT METRIC. **BY CATHERINE PERLOFF**

The trend of programmatically buying media based on attention is gaining momentum. Many of the largest ad-tech firms, including Google Display & Video 360, Xandr, Magnite, PubMatic and Teads, now offer ad buyers access to Adelaide, an attention metrics ad-tech firm.

For years, programmatic advertising has promised to use data and technology to make media buying more efficient. But that premise has been more about matching ads to consumers and less about ensuring advertisers are bidding on inventory that people will actually see.

Adelaide works by using eye-tracking data to train an algorithm on the probability of someone looking at an ad, then assigning the inventory a score between 0 and 100. Marketers will bid in an environment that already scores high for Adelaide's metric, dubbed Attention Unit (AU), with vetted publishers and placements.

Buyers will still buy media via impressions and CPMs, though there is some hope that attention will eventually be its own currency.

The industry is embracing supply path optimization and the climate of innovation spurred by third-party cookie deprecation. A marketer using attention metrics would still need an identifier to buy their media, but in an era with fewer data points, attention is one more signal buyers can count on.

SPORTS MARKETING

Two companies are using their advertising dollars to bridge the sports gender gap. Financial services firm **Ally** partnered with **Disney** for a sponsorship package with a 90% media investment solely in women's sports. Insurer **Aflac**, meanwhile, pivoted its March Madness plan entirely to the women's Final Four, including relocating an activation. "We don't want it as a value-add," Ally CMO Andrea Brimmer said. "We want to pay for it, and we wanted it to be the primary portion of our media package." —*Mollie Cahillane*

BIG NUMBER

$217 million

DESPITE ADDING 1.1M SUBSCRIBERS IN Q4, **WARNER BROS. DISCOVERY**'S STREAMING DIVISION POSTED A REVENUE LOSS

ON THE MOVE

IPG Mediabrands comes out on top in **Geico**'s $1.4 billion media review

Mindshare North America CEO **Amanda Richman** steps down

Wavemaker and **Publicis Media** win **Adobe**'s $500 million global review

AWARDS

BRAND GENIUS NOMINATIONS

Adweek's Brand Genius award gives companies the opportunity to nominate their dynamic, groundbreaking brand builders.

This year, we're looking to honor brand marketers with a track record of success over the past five years. We want someone who:

- Played a key leadership role in developing and/or growing a brand
- Conceived and/or led the development of a truly innovative campaign
- Proved the value of their marketing vision with measurable results
- Held their team/company accountable on DEI, accessibility and sustainability

Nominees must have a corporate title with a consumer brand, and must be submitted by March 30. For more, visit **adweek.com**.

FROM TOP, CLOCKWISE: JEFF HALSTEAD/GETTY IMAGES, WARNER BROS., DISCOVERY, PUBLICIS MEDIA, ADOBE, WAVEMAKER, MINDSHARE, IPG MEDIABRANDS, GEICO

TALENT POOL

MARTIN EKECHUKWU

THE A-FRAME BRANDS CSO PARTNERS WITH FOUNDERS OF COLOR TO DEVELOP BRANDS.
BY OLIVIA MORLEY

MICHAEL EVINS, A-FRAME BRANDS

Being a chief strategy officer is the most fun Martin Ekechukwu has had in a long time.

Ekechukwu leads strategy for A-Frame Brands, a Los Angeles-based holding company that builds solutions for underrepresented and underserved groups. It launched Kinlò Skincare with Naomi Osaka and baby care line Proudly with Gabrielle Union and Dwyane Wade.

Being a CSO is a "really fancy way of saying that I look for every opportunity possible to grow the business, grow the profile of the company," Ekechukwu said.

On any given day, he might be identifying new concepts to bring to market, conducting market research, homing in on "blue-sky opportunities" and identifying the right talent to take on a particular job.

"I bring it all the way to the end of the line, where we actually hire a full brand team to pick [a project] up and take it to the next level of growth," he said.

The CSO's professional trajectory took many turns. Hailing from a family of health care professionals, Ekechukwu intended to follow in his sister's footsteps and become a physician. When she advised him against it, he instead pursued a post-grad opportunity in pharmaceutical sales. There, he got his first "taste of marketing," he said.

"It helped me to understand how to talk to people that are ultimately buying something," he added. The sales role was temporary, though. Just as he began to worry he'd be "pigeonholed" in the career, he pivoted and began business school at Duke University.

"That started me off on a new trajectory when it came to exploring multiple career paths and opportunities in the market," he said.

A marketing internship at Ford tested his developing skill set. "I was really bad at it," Ekechukwu admitted, recalling how he used aspects of his sales role to learn more about being a marketer. He asked for help, asked questions and eventually mastered the basics. Later, he joined a marketing rotational program at Lexus and, after that, took a role at Keurig Dr Pepper (then known as Dr Pepper Snapple before the acquisition by Keurig).

By 2009, he noticed consumers' increased interest in health and wellness, spurring an entrepreneurial decision. The first company he founded, Village Tea Co., featured clean, ethically made ingredients and sustainable packaging.

The tea was a hit, landing Ekechukwu on The Dr. Oz Show and receiving endorsements from Oprah Winfrey, solidifying his career as a purpose-driven entrepreneur. As his interest in purpose-driven work grew, he also founded a marketing agency called WhtWrks, partnering with BET Networks and Dick Clark Productions to tell stories about people of color, and advising clients including LinkedIn, Nike and Facebook. In 2021, WhtWrks was fourth on Adweek's Fastest Growing Agencies list.

By the time Ekechukwu took the C-suite job at A-Frame, he had amassed a trove of brand-building knowledge to pass along to other founders. When A-Frame CEO Ari Bloom asked Ekechukwu if he was interested, he jumped at the opportunity.

"I really wanted to dive deeper, beyond just content, and really go back to my Village Tea Company days of creating things that you can consume, things that were good for you," he said.

BIG MISTAKE

"When I was at my tea company, I was absolutely determined to prove everyone wrong. I did not ask for help," Ekechukwu said. "I found myself alone. I found myself completely shut off because I didn't want to admit mistakes."

LESSON LEARNED

Aspiring entrepreneurs should explore opportunities until they're absolutely sure they won't work. "A lot of the time, it's timing," he said. "Sometimes it's luck." A few ideas Ekechukwu gave up on eventually worked out for other founders who kept going and took them to market.

HOW HE GOT THE GIG

Ekechukwu was fraternity brothers with actor Hill Harper, who later connected him to Bloom. "This is a moment in time where sometimes getting up and introducing yourself, and talking to people and saying hello, leads to something," he said.

PRO TIP

"Solve a problem. If you solve a problem, you will win, period. Simple as that," Ekechukwu said.

“THE WORK OF AN AGENCY IS WARMLY AND IMMEDIATELY HUMAN. IT DEALS WITH HUMAN NEEDS, WANTS, HOPES AND DREAMS.”

– LEO BURNETT

Thank you to our people, our clients, and our partners for making this dream come true.

Starcom

ADWEEK’S U.S. MEDIA AGENCY OF THE YEAR

INCLUSIVE REPRESENTATION MAKES 'MARKETING WORK BETTER FOR EVERYONE'

DISABILITY ADVOCATE KR LIU HELPS GOOGLE, AND ALL ADVERTISERS, EMBRACE LONG-MARGINALIZED GROUPS.

Globally, 15% of the population is disabled, but you wouldn't know that by looking at most advertising: Only 2% of it features members of disability communities. That statistic is shamefully low, but it's finally starting to tick up thanks to trailblazers like our cover subject, KR Liu. After losing most of her hearing at age 3, Google's head of brand accessibility has become one of the industry's most influential advocates for inclusive representation.

In her incredible interview with senior editor Robert Klara, Liu talks about her own remarkable journey, which included initially trying to hide her disability from co-workers. But it ended up becoming one of Liu's greatest assets, leading to her helping Google create (and share industrywide) its Accessible Marketing Playbook, which, according to CMO Lorraine Twohill, will "make marketing work better for everyone."

As Liu explains in our cover story, the progress that Google and a few other pioneering brands have made in disability inclusion will eventually "create a whole new vertical … where you have marketers and brands, storytellers and strategists thinking about this space."

Jason Lynch
Senior Managing Editor, TV and Features
@jasonlynch

And that's only the beginning. Marketers are realizing that they must be inclusive in their work, focus on diversity in all the ways it manifests for consumers, and embrace groups they have long marginalized across race, age, ability and sexuality. Those efforts are spotlighted in our New Consumer theme, both throughout this issue—which also includes features on reaching Generation Alpha and the DEI commitments that will shape this year's upfront—and its accompanying expanded digital package.

Be sure to check out the full New Consumer package (scan the QR code below) to find several more in-depth stories delving into this theme, including how brands can help close the representation gap by looking within their own companies, the importance of marketing to eco-conscious consumers and how marketers are embracing inclusive design to boost relevancy (and profits).

And there's even more in this issue, as we also spotlight Adweek's Media Agency of the Year honorees for 2023. Managing editor Jameson Fleming and his Agencies team showcase a sensational trio of worthy winners, from a heritage shop with 1940s roots to a scrappy upstart that didn't even have a media practice five years ago. Congratulations to all three agencies—the first of many groundbreaking companies and execs Adweek will be honoring throughout the year.

THE NEW CONSUMER

Scan to view Adweek's complete package of stories delving into this theme.

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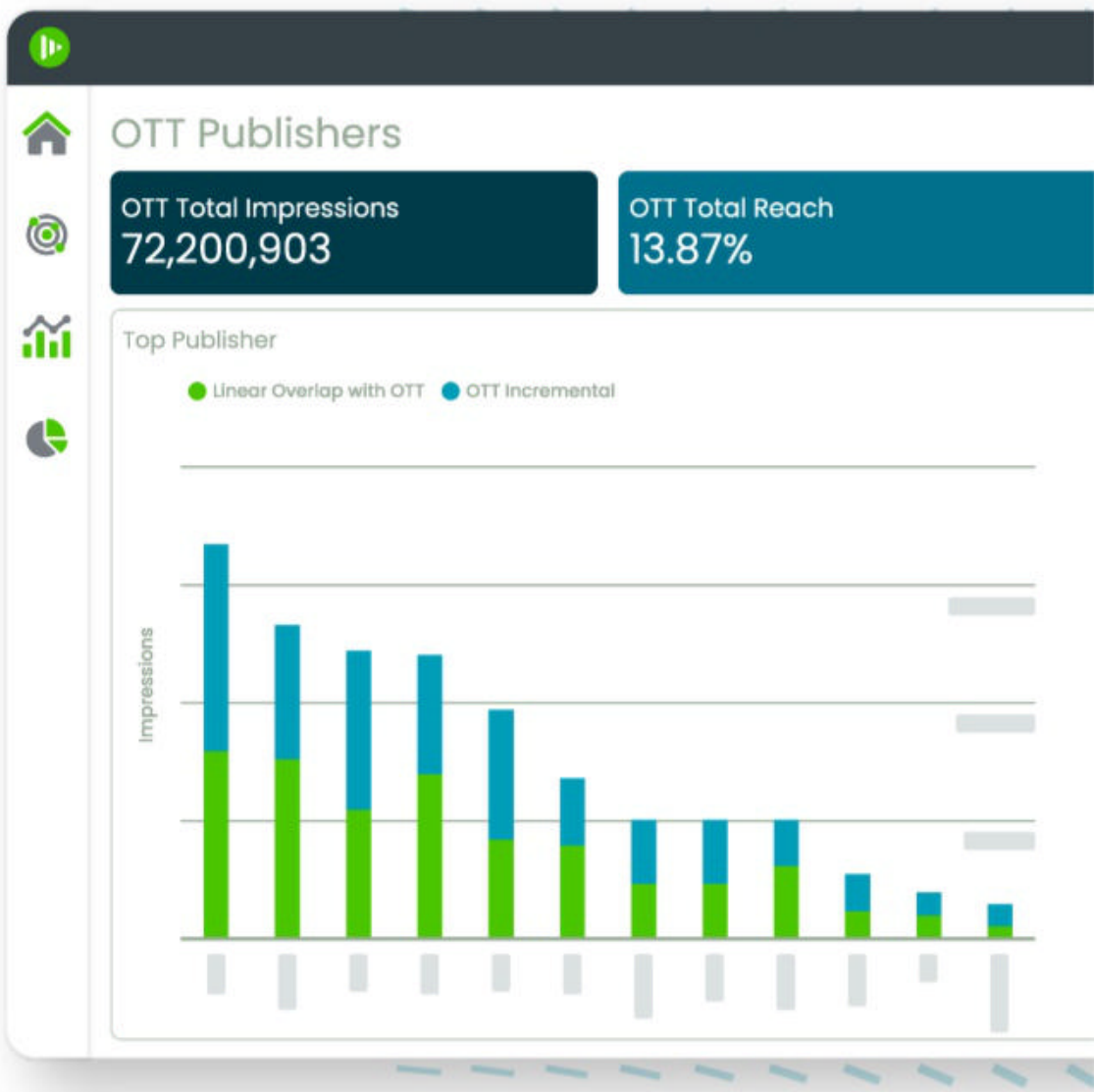

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TRENDS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Insights

How Marketers Should—and Shouldn't—Talk to Gen Alpha

GEN Z'S YOUNGER SIBLINGS PRIORITIZE BRAND PURPOSE AND COVET COMMUNITY.

BY EMMY LIEDERMAN

In the Y2K era of ubiquitous Proactiv commercials, skin care routines served the apparent purpose of treating unwanted acne. But in a TikTok-powered world where consumer allegiance is fueled more by lighthearted show-and-tell than bona fide product utility, 9-year-olds are drenching their faces in anti-aging serum before displaying a single sign of puberty.

Now, a new generation of Kardashian kids—Penelope Disick and North West, who have assumed trailblazing roles in this skin care-obsessed movement—have turned to TikTok to broadcast beauty regimens that emulate those of their Kardashian mothers (Kourtney and Kim, respectively). While this demographic mimics some trends that older generations have established, it is also developing unparalleled traits that can inform both current and future strategy.

"Marketers need to understand this generation because they have huge influence over millennial parents," said Therese Caruso, global director of strategy and planning at integrated communications agency Zeno Group, adding that brands must invest in crafting intimate relationships with an age group that is more difficult to win over. "They need brands that will help them navigate the world and mirror their values."

While there is a clear appeal for marketers in expanding their consumer base beyond Gen Z to reach younger audiences, according to Ife Tabi, assistant manager at full-service communications firm Noah's Ark Communications, that doesn't always mean they should.

"The brand custodians need to ask themselves if appealing to the younger market is truly in their interest," Tabi said, adding that adult-centric brands tarnish their reputation when they "feign coolness." "Appealing to a younger group but alienating the historical group may be more unhelpful in the long term."

While millennial parents have the most direct impact on Gen Alpha, Gen Z purchasing patterns are trickling down to those younger kids—and brands must decide to what extent they can ethically lean into that influence without alienating older consumers and flirting with a tarnished reputation. Due to FTC regulations, marketers aren't granted complete access to Gen Alpha—defined as those born in or after 2010—but researching Gen Z and millennials offers them a solid idea of how to target what will become the largest generation in history.

While technology has unreservedly molded Gen Alpha's perception of the world, this demographic also craves offline experiences. And instead of devaluing Gen Alphas in this state of economic uncertainty, expert said that brands should be expanding their research on an age group that is still not largely understood.

All marketers need to be wary of blurring the lines between paid promotions and organic content by clearly labeling ads, but this is especially true when catering to a population that is just learning to understand the world. Technology is only expediting this generation's childhood development—the majority of kids under 2 are already watching YouTube, consumer insights agency Canvas8 reported—and while it may be tempting for brands to construct a direct blend of millennial and Gen Z consumer strategies when engaging with Gen Alpha, marketers must approach this generation with the utmost care and sensitivity.

"Marketing products to children is something of a fool's errand," said Mark Giovino, CEO and founding partner at agency Allionce Group. "Their preferences move so fast. It is the parent that must be bought."

The return of in-person learning—as well as the growth of TikTok as a multigenerational platform—has only increased the blurred lines between Gen Z and Gen Alpha. Morning Consult found that more than 63% of Gen Z women have a favorable opinion of Ulta Beauty, and increasingly youthful "Get Ready With Me" content shows that this affiliation with beauty and skin care products is expanding to a younger population.

"If Gen Alphas are in school, you better believe they're looking up to the older kids and taking lots of notes," said Caruso.

More than 4 in 5 Gen Alpha parents said their kids ask for **specific TV shows or food and snack brands** by name, according to Morning Consult.

Combining generational insights

While expanding research on Gen Alpha is crucial, keeping up with this generation's dynamic interests is a challenging feat: Kids will fixate on Peppa Pig one day and decide they only like Paw Patrol the next. Because kids' interests are so ever-changing, it's wise to think instead about what parents consistently want. Tariq Hassan, chief marketing and digital customer experience officer for U.S. operations at McDonald's, said leaning into virtual channels like rewards programs and curbside pickup through the app fulfills the busy millennial parent's prioritization of savings and convenience.

Embracing activism and encouraging community

Gen Alpha is also a notably socially conscious generation, which brands must keep in mind when committing to a genuine purpose. Canvas8 found that 6% of Gen Alphas want to buy from brands that "have a positive impact on the world."

As Gen Alphas are the strongest champions of environmentalism, Caruso pointed to Mattel as a brand that understands this generation's needs. In addition to repurposing old Barbie dolls—and the additional layer of playing into the millennial nostalgia that connects kids and their parents—the toy conglomerate launched its Barbie Loves The Ocean doll collection in 2021, which is made from ocean-bound plastic.

Caruso also praised brands that welcome fluid identities—58% of Alphas under age 10 say gender is irrelevant, according to entertainment and creative agency Beano Studios.

While there is a strong stereotype that members of Gen Alpha are glued to their screens, Caruso calls this age group the "free range and Harvard generation." Shaped by their millennial parents, they are balancing studies in front of a computer with going outside and enjoying nature.

To accommodate this versatility, Caruso stressed that marketers can organize exclusive events—both offline and in the metaverse—that simultaneously engage Gen Alpha and their parents. According to a Wunderman Thompson study, 38% of Gen Alphas said they prefer shopping online over in-store, and 75% said they would enjoy shopping at a retail store.

"Having an in-person, socially conscious event, like a climate crusade where kids can also win rewards on a platform, would be very memorable and impactful," said Caruso. "It's about engaging with them through experiences and events instead of marketing to them openly online."

Communicating with caution

These hybrid experiences carry an added brand safety benefit, as the naiveté of children is only exacerbated virtually, especially in an unpredictable digital landscape that can be difficult for parents to closely monitor. Caruso pointed to Epic Games, Fortnite's parent company, which faced an FTC lawsuit in December for violating childhood privacy laws, changing default privacy settings and tricking users into making unwanted purchases.

Amy Gilbert, head of social at global social media agency The Social Element, said that brands shouldn't let an organically expanding consumer base force them to lose touch with their core audience. Instead of unconditionally embracing a younger generation's sudden fixation with retinol and anti-aging serums, marketers can embrace product education.

"Brands need to recognize when a product might have been picked up by someone too young to use it," said Gilbert. "Can brands come together and have this 'big sister' mentality? They can use influencers for good and say, 'Here's what you need and don't need to use.'"

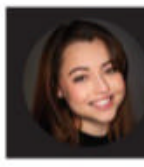

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PHOTO (OPPOSITE): MICROSTOCKHUB/ISTOCK; ILLUSTRATIONS: PETRO BEVZ/ISTOCK, GODFATHER744431/ISTOCK, CAKO74/ISTOCK, SEAMARTINI/ISTOCK

ChatGPT Upends Advertising and Marketing Jobs

AI LEADS COMPANIES TO PRIORITIZE QUALITY ASSURANCE AND STRATEGY.

BY PATRICK KULP

When IPG-owned performance marketing agency Reprise Digital began using a form of the same AI that powers ChatGPT a couple of years ago, it started with a test.

The firm pitted its OpenAI-powered copywriting software, Transcribe—paired with human editors—against internal and external teams of copywriters to write digital content for financial clients. Each team's results were judged on factors like cost and turnaround time.

"We saw that Transcribe was magnitudes more efficient when used by people that are changing its output a little bit versus external copywriters or internal teams," said Vincent Spruyt, Reprise's head of AI. The tests clocked an 87% reduction in production time between the AI and internal copywriting teams.

These results might confirm some people's fears—that AI is coming for our jobs—but the reality is more nuanced.

As agencies and marketers begin to implement much-hyped AI language tools like ChatGPT, they are likely to change their priorities for marketing jobs. Experts expect a shift to quality assurance and editing roles rather than pure creative when it comes to performance marketing. At the same time, brands and agencies predict that strategy jobs will become more valuable as organizations zero in on roles that can help direct how AI will be used.

At Reprise, Transcribe has allowed copywriters to focus more on strategy and keyword optimization rather than agonizing over every word in a given chunk of text, Spruyt said.

As AI tools are further implemented across the production chain, to the point where performance gauges like social listening can feed directly into production software like Transcribe, the makeup of teams could shift to focus more on overarching strategy. "That's how the future of dynamic creative optimization is going to look," Spruyt said.

That future may not be far off. A recent survey of 1,000 business leaders currently using ChatGPT from job site ResumeBuilder and market research firm Pollfish found that around 58% were exploring use cases for marketing and content. Around a quarter said the system has saved their company at least $75,000 via more efficient processes in areas like writing code and content, as well as copywriting and customer support.

"I am surprised at how quickly it's being accepted and applied," said ResumeBuilder chief career adviser Stacie Haller.

To prompt or not to prompt

While David Stein, vp of performance marketing at Wunderman Thompson, has already seen marketing or agency job postings soliciting candidates who can understand the esoteric lexicon of prompt language that has evolved to coax the best results out of AI tools, he thinks such hiring is ultimately short-sighted.

Given the breakneck pace of this new technology, it's only a matter of time before these skills are rendered null by intuitive interfaces or easy-to-follow scripts. "Eventually, AI is going to get smarter and more intuitive," Stein said.

Wunderman sent a memo to clients in February warning them off of AI-generated content for now. It cited the technology's potential for inaccuracies and the embarrassing scandal that played out around tech publisher CNET's error-riddled AI-generated posts in January.

"We're not in the 'oops' business," said Stein. They aren't the only ones: At Reprise, Spruyt said some of the agency's big brand clients have requested that the AI not be used for their brand.

Demand for human editors

Given the propensity for inaccuracy, most experts agree that language AI implementation will require more quality assurance staff who can check for factual errors and instances where AI may veer off into what machine learning scientists call hallucinations, or meandering non sequiturs unrelated to a given prompt.

Stein said there will likely also be more need for subject-matter experts who can take a machine-produced blog post and add the human experience and knowledge to make it useful and informative.

Of course, in this stage of adoption, a working knowledge of how tools like ChatGPT operate and how they can be used for creative purposes is already in high demand.

At AKQA, which has become known for creative AI work like a recent commercial for GoFundMe, the AI boom is pushing the agency to beef up teams that understand strategy around how to best deploy these tools, said AKQA North America president Tesa Aragones.

"We're hiring people to help us build teams in AI in technology and data practice," Aragones said. "So overall, using the technology and the data actually helps us to be more creative and imagine how we can do more for our clients."

PATRICK KULP IS AN ADWEEK SENIOR REPORTER COVERING EMERGING TECH. HE REPORTS ON CREATIVE INNOVATION, AR, VR, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE FUTURE OF 5G. **@PATRICKKULP**

PHOTO: BAONA/ISTOCK

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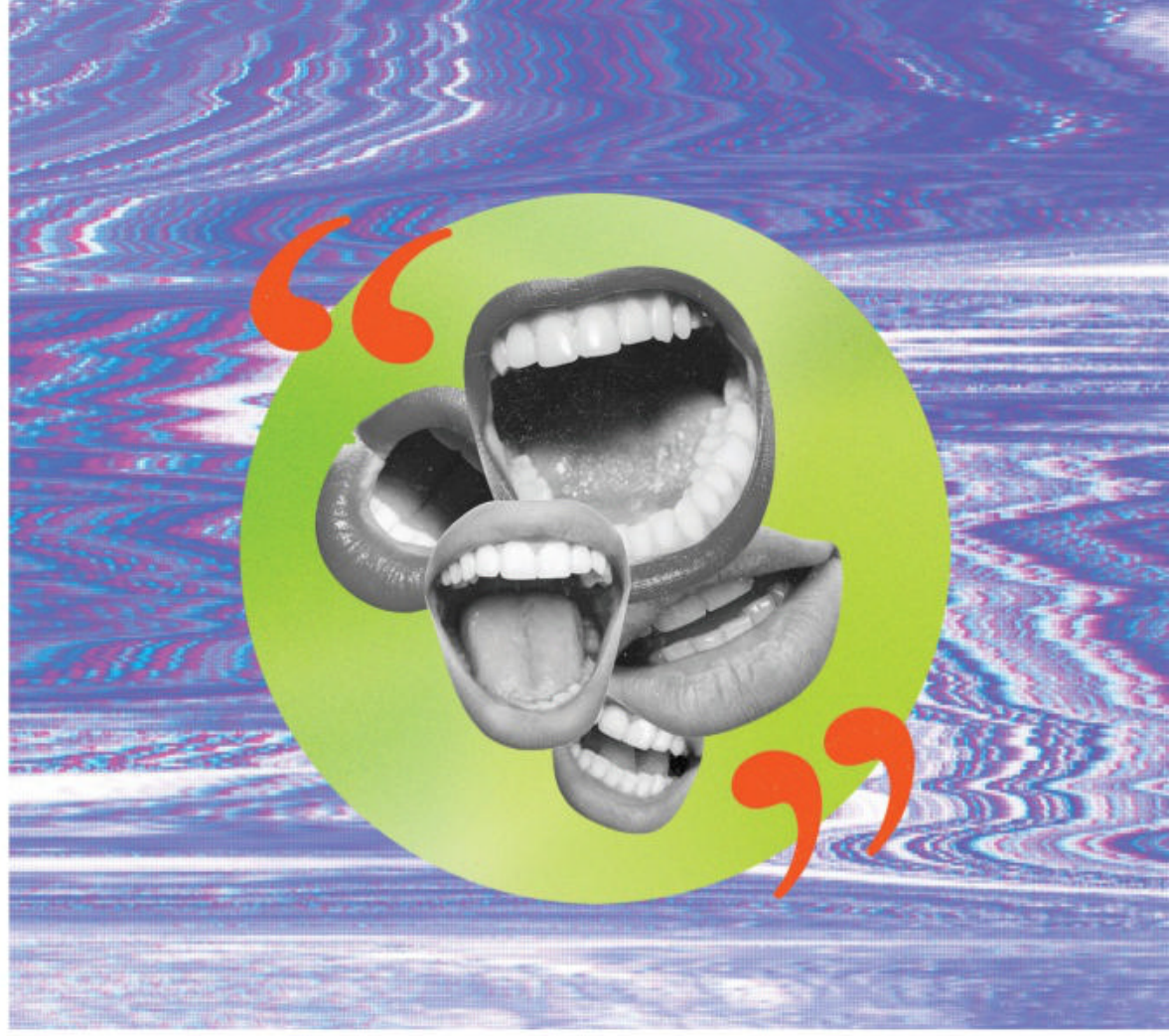
Initiative

DEI Upfront Pledges Aren't Just Lip Service

PUBLISHERS AND BUYERS REMAIN COMMITTED TO MEANINGFUL CHANGE, DESPITE ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY. **BY BILL BRADLEY**



When it comes to DEI pledges from advertisers and media companies, talk is cheap. There's a big difference between making upfront equity promises and actually putting forth the eight- or nine-figure ad sales spend required to back that up—especially in the midst of a soft ad market with a possible recession looming.

But despite the economic uncertainty, the DEI promises aren't just lip service, according to Lisa Torres, president, multicultural, at Publicis Media.

"This is a very different environment than what I've seen in prior recessions. This always becomes a focus during census releases," Torres said. "This time, it's really from a societal standpoint, the injustices that we knew were in the system but didn't necessarily address them in the way that we're addressing them now."

With this year's upfront talks already underway, the spotlight will shine on DEI assurances once again, likely with more scrutiny than ever as industry watchdogs start to check receipts. However, in backing up their promises by taking on systemic, industrywide issues, several publishers and advertisers are indeed putting their money where their mouth is.

That includes Horizon Media. In addition to utilizing internal tools such as Hispanic FairShare and Black Media Equity to connect clients with diverse audiences and working with Maven to bring clients to diverse-owned suppliers, Horizon Media introduced its eMbrace platform in 2022 as a way to make its media spend more inclusive. The customized software and data solution, which Nielsen powers, aims to bring cultural equity to communications and media planning.

"[Inclusivity] is one of the reasons why we're looking at alternative currencies—iSpot and VideoAmp, in particular. In our early analysis of their sample sizes in their households, they have better representation of diverse audiences," said David Campanelli, evp and chief investment officer at Horizon Media.

During its third annual Equity Upfront event in February, Magna, the investment company of IPG Mediabrands, also helped connect its clients with diverse media suppliers, giving those partners—36 in all—the platform they needed to pitch brand marketers.

"When we started this, and we were the first to do this, it was focused on Black-owned," said Dani Benowitz, Magna president, U.S. "That was three years ago. We have expanded that reach to include Hispanic-Latino, Asian and LGBTQ+ to ensure that we weren't just focusing in one area because diversity takes many shapes and forms."

'This is not a check-the-box exercise ... [the best storytelling] takes hiring the best talent in front and behind the camera.'

Rita Ferro, ad sales chief, Disney

Benowitz noted that while diverse audiences are loyal, marketers need to speak to them authentically, a point echoed by several others in the industry.

"Most marketers think, 'I'm getting 20-30% of the U.S. Hispanic audience, and I'm working to these general markets, so I'm just going to cut everybody's spend,'" Fernando Romero, svp of digital advertising sales, TelevisaUnivision, said. "Well, do you also understand that 90% of our audience is actually exclusive to us? So you're missing out on a whole new segment."

From the diversity-focused verticals on HBO Max to Disney's Onyx Collective, meaningful DEI content has multiplied on the publishing side, as several companies are looking to connect brands with the diverse content creators under their portfolios. Disney has rolled out several DEI initiatives over the years, including its Disney Culture Index, which scores and optimizes ad creative on metrics such as cultural authenticity.

"This is not a check-the-box exercise," said Disney ad sales chief Rita Ferro. "It's how do we have the best talent creating the best storytelling, and that takes hiring the best talent in front and behind the camera and making sure that our platforms deliver that as broadly as possible."

Delivering on DEI promises

So far, the DEI efforts on both sides have paid off.

Disney has required multicultural ad buys as part of its upfront negotiations since 2021, and Ferro told Adweek that after clients tripled Disney's overall upfront DEI ask in 2022, the company is challenging them to triple its original ask again this year.

On the buying side, leveraging eMbrace resulted in a 25% year-over-year increase in client media investments in minority media at Horizon. Meanwhile, Mediabrands increased year-over-year ad investment with Black-owned media by 61%, Asian-owned media by 32% and Hispanic/Latino-owned media by 7%.

Sheereen Miller-Russell, svp ad sales and inclusive content monetization, Warner Bros. Discovery, said that while economic pressures have caused some brands to focus on other objectives, several companies are "doubling down," especially amid changing U.S. demographics.

In short, the industrywide DEI push will only expand in the coming year. "Sometimes we talk about, 'We've made progress, and we're getting there,' but there's no end game," Campanelli said. "This is something we're doing in perpetuity."

BILL BRADLEY IS ADWEEK'S DEPUTY TV EDITOR. HE PREVIOUSLY WORKED AT SCREEN RANT AND HUFFINGTON POST. **@GUMGUMERSON**

PHOTO: ANTON VIERIETIN/ISTOCK, BRAVISSIMOS/ISTOCK

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Brandwatch

‘Shoppers Can Be Swayed’

THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR PRIVATE-LABEL BRANDS TO WIN CONSUMERS’ HEARTS—AND WALLETS.

BY PAUL HIEBERT

High inflation has made buying everyday goods—from yogurt and ketchup to trash bags and laundry detergent—more taxing on households across the country.

As a result, a growing number of shoppers are reaching for store brands, also known as private labels, to help ease the cost of keeping their refrigerators full and pantries stocked.

Last year, U.S. sales of store brands rose 11.3% compared to 2021, resulting in record-breaking revenue of $228.6 billion, according to the Private Label Manufacturers Association. National brands, meanwhile, climbed 6.1% to $981.1 billion.

“Shoppers are increasingly likely to buy a store brand versus a national brand now than they were six months and one year ago,” said Aliza Freud, CEO of influencer marketing agency SheSpeaks.

According to a SheSpeaks survey of more than 1,200 U.S. women, conducted in partnership with The Mars Agency, price is only one of several reasons shoppers might switch brands.

Nine in 10 participants, for instance, said they feel it’s important to take advantage of loyalty programs. Many also showed concern for the nutritional value of food and beverages. Product availability and unique flavors play a role as well.

Overall, fewer than 1 in 3 consumers reported being certain about which brands they’ll purchase before visiting a store. That means the majority are open to changing their minds anywhere between writing a grocery list to scanning that final item at the cash register.

As Freud put it: “Shoppers can be swayed.”

When shopping for groceries:

AGREE ● DISAGREE ●

- 65% / 33% — I would rather get the best price than the best brand.
- 51% / 48% — I shop quickly rather than browse.
- 90% / 7% — It’s important to get the most out of loyalty programs.
- 72% / 27% — I research products before going to the store.
- 85% / 15% — The nutritional value of food is very important.

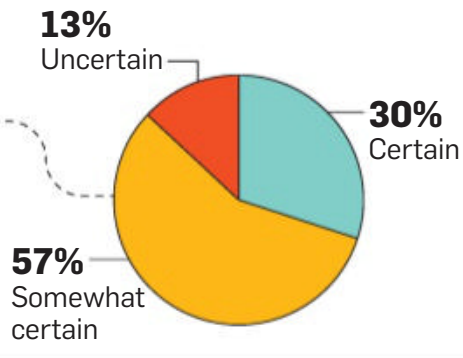
What makes you loyal to certain brands?

- Quality **79%**
- Price **78%**
- Taste **77%**
- Nutritional value **38%**
- Brand values **13%**
- Organic **10%**
- Tradition **8%**

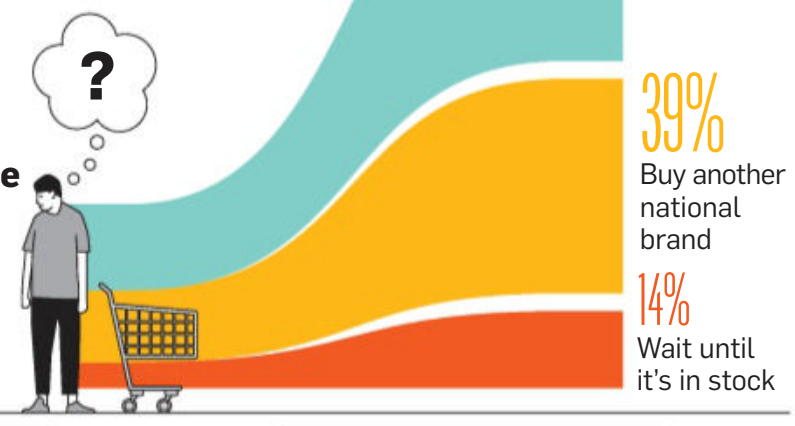
What makes you switch brands?

- **75%** Out of stock
- **61%** Price
- **53%** New flavor/variety
- **27%** Favorite brand changed
- **12%** Recipe recommendation
- **11%** Brand values

Before leaving the house, how certain are you about which brands you’ll buy?

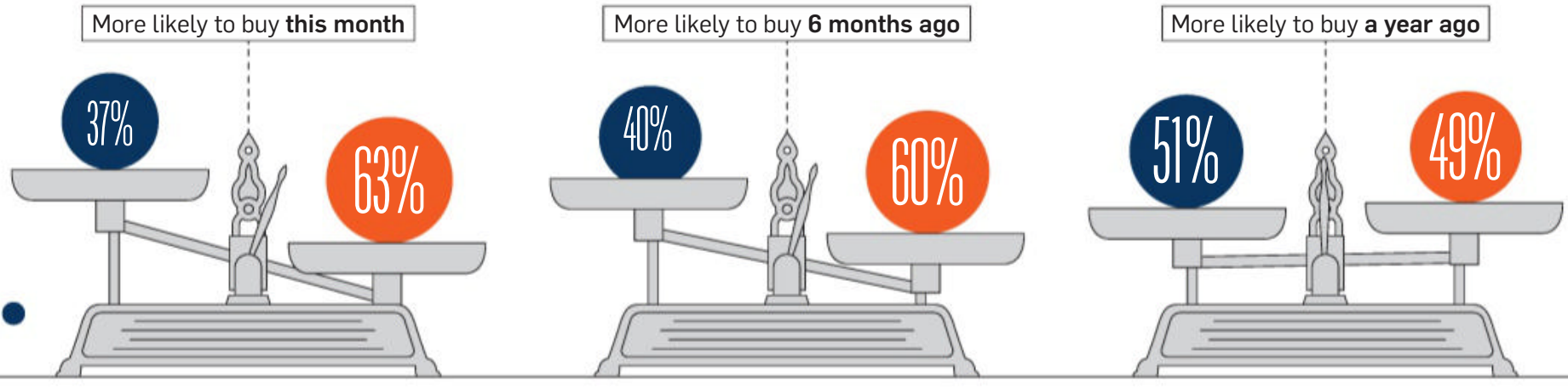


If your favorite brand isn't available, you’re most likely to:



National brands vs. store brands

NATIONAL BRAND ●
STORE BRAND ●



INFOGRAPHIC: CARLOS MONTEIRO / SOURCE: SPLASH / SOME RESPONSES MAY NOT ADD UP TO 100% BECAUSE OF SKIPPED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS NOT LISTED.

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OPERATIVE

Reframing Accessibility

IT'S TIME TO EMBRACE INCLUSION AS A SUBLIME DIFFERENTIATOR. **BY JOSH LOEBNER**

Accessibility is a long word, and in an industry that loves truncating titles—KFC, BMW, UPS, REI—we need to embrace a11y.

This numeronym (where numbers form an abbreviation) conveys that in between the A and Y of "accessibility," there are 11 more letters. For many nondisabled people, accessibility can seem like a foreign concept that requires monumental changes; using a11y makes inclusion more approachable, personal and achievable.

This subtle moniker change may help to shift thinking and actions from accessibility as "something another department deals with" to a reframing of how everyone has the power to be an ally across departments and throughout the creative process.

Accessibility is at an all-time high in terms of visibility. But implementation comes down to how agencies and clients interpret it, moving from a marginalized agenda item to a call to action with multifaceted returns.

There are growing opportunities to reach more groups through more accessible pathways, especially since the disability community has grown beyond the physical to include neurodiversity, such as autism, and other cognitive disabilities like dyslexia.

Accessibility as creativity

To truly incorporate accessibility into creativity, the ideative process needs to be realigned, starting with the brief all the way to the production of campaign assets.

For some creative teams, accessible elements such as captions, alt tags or audio descriptions may still be viewed as unimportant and disconnected from the rest of a campaign. With 1 in 4 people in the U.S. and more than a billion people globally disabled, accessibility should be anything but an afterthought.

Done poorly, accessibility as creativity can create ambiguity and cause this massive potential customer base to abandon your brand. Executed optimally, it galvanizes consumers, corporations and media on a global scale. Apple's "The Greatest," Amazon's Accessibility Anthem and Mastercard's Touch Card commercials are just a few examples that aligned, refined and defined the concept of accessibility as creativity.

Although the advertising industry is still in the initial stages of including immersive audio descriptions and captions, accessibility as creativity is moving beyond the confines of campaigns to innovative product design. Disability entrepreneurs and startups, alongside multinational conglomerates, are tapping into accessibility as a differentiator.

Once confined to products found only in pharmacies and medical specialty stores, accessibility as creativity has pushed these items into the mainstream, with disabled consumers and caregivers now able to find a11y products across a range of retailers and categories from clothing to groceries, grooming to makeup.

Apps, connected packaging (which incorporates a digital component like a QR code), artificial intelligence, 3D printing, remote and hybrid work, and online shopping are converging to elevate creativity into networked, ongoing and deeper consumer connections. Some of many brand innovations with an eye to inclusivity include Ikea's 3D-printed a11y ThisAbles add-ons, Lancome's Hapta motorized makeup applicator and Microsoft's adaptive computer accessories.

Accessibility as humanity

Accessibility has, for far too long, been relegated to technical compliance. It is often confined to jargon-filled project phases centering on remediation and risk mitigation.

Those areas are justified, but let us move more conversations

'Accessibility as creativity is moving beyond the confines of campaigns.'

and commitments from technical requirements to human-centric innovation. Too often, digital teams consider accessibility at the end of a project, with responsibility falling to the quality assurance team or an outside vendor. This results in websites with minimal and obligatory accessibility features.

Reframing accessibility as humanity will open a new world where experience teams, service designers, social media strategists, creative directors, copywriters and others can imbue inclusive design at each point within a creative process through the final project. Brands will benefit from expanded omnichannel content and more options for creative assets along the customer journey.

For accessibility to effectively span these diverse agency and brand teams, a11y can be achieved through dedicated design training, accessibility leadership and broader involvement from department staff acting as ambassadors of disability knowledge and empathy. Consider opening the co-creation process to include experts among disability communities and occupational therapists who can guide your development team to success.

Accessibility is the foundation and throughline, achieved when each of us commits to being a marketing a11y. After all, creativity and humanity at their best are accessible, welcoming, memorable and inspire action.

PHOTO: KLAUS VEDFELT/GETTY IMAGES

Specs

Claim to fame Josh Loebner is the global head of inclusive design at Wunderman Thompson.
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WHEN GOOD BRANDS MAKE BAD PRODUCTS

THE MUSEUM OF FAILURE SPOTLIGHTS INNOVATION'S MESSY RESULTS. **BY EVA KIS**

Perfection is out. We want our heroes flawed, our romantic comedies realistic and our images un-retouched.

But does this mean the world's biggest brands are ready for a traveling exhibit called the Museum of Failure that showcases their failed products?

"No," laughed Samuel West, the project's founder and an organizational psychologist by trade. "Nobody wanted to have anything to do with this."

Despite his extensive network of innovation directors, West couldn't get a single brand onboard when he launched the museum in 2017 in Sweden. "That was really a wake-up call, that this is much more sensitive than I thought," he added.

So he built the collection through Craigslist, eBay and Russian classified ads. The Museum of Failure opened with some 60-70 items. Once it was a success—ironically—brands including Microsoft and Ikea began knocking at West's door, offering their most regrettable products (current total: about 170) to be put in a shadowbox so people from Shanghai to Paris to Los Angeles—and New York beginning March 17—can shake their heads and wonder, "How did this get made?"

Having worked with innovators and marketers at every stage, from his classroom at Lund University to multinational companies as a consultant, West assures that "you can fail in any number of ways."

The exhibit includes the ideas that never should've gone past "the beer and Post-It note phase," like 1999's Rejuvenique toning mask, an electrified Iron Maiden for your face. Sometimes, the marketing department overhypes a product: Apple is guilty of not listening to its engineers at least twice, first with 1993's Apple Newton MessagePad whose killer handwriting recognition feature didn't actually work, then the disastrous launch of Apple Maps in 2012.

There's leadership hubris, bad market timing, not enough product testing (Olestra, anyone?) and a whole world of things outside a company's control. And all of this continues to happen despite the bottomless trove of consumer research that is social media.

Then there are the companies that keep failing at the same thing: Coca-Cola has tried to make coffee-flavored Coke happen twice already, the first time with Coca-Cola Blak in 2006 and again in 2021 with Coca-Cola With Coffee—neither lasted more than two years on the U.S. market.

Others just need time to get it right: It took the Nintendo Power Glove (1989) and Virtual Boy (1995) before the gaming console maker hit the body-as-joystick jackpot with the Nintendo Wii in 2006.

But on the whole, even though failure is virtually inherent to being an innovator, "companies, even the most successful ones, they're just not well equipped to learn from failure," West said. "They don't put in the necessary resources or the effort to actually learn something when things go wrong."

However, West does see signs that failure is being embraced. There's the "no-blame culture" within some German companies that "provides psychological safety and an environment where you can admit and discuss when things go wrong," he said. And marketing is shifting away from the fiction of a perfect product—West cites the famously self-deprecating campaigns of another Swedish export, Oatly.

In fact, according to West, branding and advertising professionals are the ones who most appreciate the Museum of Failure.

"They seem to get it—why pushing the idea that a brand is perfect backfires," he said. "People want something authentic and genuine, and when something is perfect, it's not authentic or genuine."

SEE GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT

RIGHT:
SAMUEL WEST, FOUNDER OF THE MUSEUM

FROM TOP:
AMONG THE PRODUCTS ON DISPLAY ARE THE NINTENDO POWER GLOVE; CRYSTAL PEPSI AND NEW COKE; AND LINDA EVANS' REJUVENIQUE.

REJUVENIQUE
Clinically Proven 12 Week Program for Improved Skin Elasticity, Reduction of Crows Feet, Wrinkles, and Beautiful Skin Tone.
AS SEEN ON TV
THE ULTIMATE FACIAL TONING SYSTEM

SEE GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT; ROBYN BECK/GETTY IMAGES (CENTER, RIGHT)

ACCESSIBILITY AGENT OF Change

KR Liu once kept quiet about her disability at work. Now the Google exec is one of the industry's loudest—and most influential—voices for inclusive representation. By Robert Klara | Photographs by Chona Kasinger

As

Google's head of brand accessibility, KR Liu is as influential a voice for the disabled community as you'll find on the corporate carpet. Her injunction to marketers—the time has come to get serious about inclusion—won global attention last year with Google's release of its Accessible Marketing Playbook, a seminal document that Liu had a big hand in creating. More than two years in the making, the playbook is a comprehensive how-to manual for marketers looking to reach historically marginalized groups, including plus-size consumers, the LGBTQ+ community and people with disabilities.

But Liu's credibility also stems from a personal experience. It's a story she will tell if you ask her, and it goes like this:

In 2007, Liu was a decade into a Silicon Valley career, working in channel development for a small firm called Speck Products. Getting a foothold in tech had not been easy for a young woman—let alone one with a significant, albeit invisible, disability. Liu had lost most of her hearing at age 3. Fearing that her condition would stymie her career, Liu had kept it a secret from her colleagues.

Until one day when her hearing aid quit working.

The new device's $3,500 price tag immediately put her in debt. But when the audiologist added that the hearing aid would take a week to arrive, Liu knew the jig was up: She would have to tell her CEO about her disability. Driving back to the office, Liu felt alone and frightened—yet also, strangely, relieved.

"I actually hoped that moment would have happened—because it was getting to a point where, emotionally and mentally, it was weighing on me," Liu told Adweek. "Also, there are two sides to me: the disability I was hiding, and the fact that I was a gay woman. And being a woman in tech—not easy."

As things turned out, however, the day that Liu hit bottom became a pivotal day in her career. Because her CEO—Irene Baran, herself a trailblazer in an industry dominated by tech bros—had seen Liu's potential long before Liu did.

"What I impressed upon her was how very successful she was already, and she should not be questioning the value that she brought," Baran told Adweek, the episode still vivid in her mind. "I think she just needed to be picked up off the floor."

Baran did more than that. She told Liu that her future lay beyond a single sales job—that she had a responsibility to tell her story, to advocate for her community and to push for greater disability inclusion in the corporate sector overall.

A FORCE FOR CHANGE

In the nearly two decades since, Liu has done exactly that. She's worked with multibillion-dollar behemoths like Verizon and shaped the conversation at SXSW. She's served on the boards of the Consumer Technology Association and Deaf Kids Code. She's lobbied for Sen. Elizabeth Warren to help pass the Over-the-Counter Hearing Aid Act of 2017, which dropped the price of sound-amplifying devices and made them available without a prescription. Most recently, President Joe Biden appointed Liu to the United States Access Board, a federal agency with a mandate to improve accessibility in everything from public transit to information technology.

But Liu's most impactful work has arguably been at Google, where her influence has revealed itself in products (including the Look to Speak app), in marketing (the "Child of a Deaf Adult," a spot that ran during last year's Oscars) and even in the attitudes of corporate America itself.

That last part has been the outgrowth of Google's Accessible Marketing Playbook. Since CMO Lorraine Twohill made the document public last year (see sidebar), it's become the protocol for brands just now awakening to a long-overlooked fact. People with disabilities make up 15% of the population but are visible in only 2% of advertising. They also represent more than $500 billion in buying power.

As a $1.16 trillion colossus that controls more than 26% of the digital ad market and makes everything from apps to smartphones to digital-assistant devices, Google was already turning its attention toward developing inclusive technologies. "AI research, which enables new products for people with disabilities, is an important way we drive our mission forward," Google CEO Sundar Pichai told the audience at Google I/O in 2019, some seven months before Liu took her current post.

But observers credit Liu for helping to move the company's disability-inclusion efforts along at the pace they have, and also for giving it an essential attribute: authenticity.

"She's a force," said Jill Houghton, president and CEO of Disability:IN, a nonprofit that advocates for the disabled community in the corporate sector. "She's a leader, right at Google, driving this change. And when we see leaders with disabilities, that really matters."

'IT HAPPENED BY MISTAKE'

Liu's rise to prominence is all the more striking because, as she admits, "it happened by mistake."

It was 1995 and the dot-com boom had just begun. Liu had always been interested in technology but had intended to play professional basketball—plans that ended when she broke her shooting hand. A month before high school graduation, Liu found herself in Tower Records' book section, thumbing through a C++ language manual. Like a scene from the movies, a tech executive noticed her, gave her his business card and hired her a week later.

Early on, Liu realized that she was much better at selling than she'd ever be at coding. And far from it being an impediment, Liu discovered that her disability actually gave her a competitive edge.

"My disability—how I read lips and read people's body language—made me fabulous at sales," she said. "I could tell if the person was engaged. I even had bosses who'd have me sit in important meetings and just observe. At the end of the meeting, I would tell them, 'The guy that was doing all the talking is not the decision-maker. This person sitting over here is.' And I was always right."

(She was. "Her ability to read the unsaid in a situation was very high with customers,"

5 Brands Leading the Charge in Disability Inclusion

While Google may be an industry leader when it comes to disability inclusion, it's not the only one. In fact, encouraging more brands to broaden their marketing is why Google made its Accessible Marketing Playbook public. "We didn't want to keep it for ourselves—that's moving *our* needle forward," Liu said. "What we want is the industry to move forward." What other brands are leading the charge in making overtures to disabled consumers? We asked Liu for her top five picks.—R.K.

MASTERCARD'S TOUCH CARD
As credit cards move away from embossed names and numbers, they leave behind the world's 2.2 billion blind and partially sighted population. In October 2021, Mastercard remedied that with cards featuring notches that identify cards by touch—a square notch for credit, round for debit and triangular for prepaid. The idea was "really smart," Liu said, proving that "simple things go a long way" when it comes to being inclusive.

PORSCHE
Last year, Porsche signed Oliver Lam-Watson—a double Paralympic medalist in wheelchair fencing—as its public face. A man who's lost the use of a leg might seem an unlikely endorser for a sports car, but that was the point. "I can drive an automatic car," the athlete said in a statement. "That's why my GT3 has a PDK transmission." Liu lauds Porsche for creative thinking like this. "It shows Oliver's human story not only as a Paralympian, but his love for cars," she said.

SKIMS' ADAPTIVE COLLECTION
Co-founded by Swedish fashion entrepreneur Jens Grede and Kim Kardashian, Skims—with its wide range of colors to match skin tones and sizes to match actual bodies—was already an inclusive brand. But it upped the ante in 2022 with its Adaptive Collection. Designed for people with limited mobility, the pieces feature hook-and-eye closures that can be put on while the wearer is seated. "I really love what Skims did," Liu said. Kardashian, she added, "is so influential" already, and the collection "recognizes there's a business need."

GUIDE BEAUTY
This makeup brand caught Liu's attention when it named actress Selma Blair, who has multiple sclerosis, as chief creative officer. Ergonomically designed, Guide's products can be easily applied by those with limited hand mobility—and everyone else. As Blair commented in a company video, "You just have to think, 'What's going to work for more people?'" Liu gives the brand high marks for "show[ing] the power of inclusive design with and for the disability community."

HILLMAN GRAD BOOKSTORE
Lena Waithe, an Emmy-winning producer, writer and creator of color, operates a production company called Hillman Grad, which recently launched a capsule apparel collection under the name Hillman Grad Bookstore. Head over to the website and you'll see a looping video featuring 10 models (plus one golden retriever) modeling the clothes—everyone from actress Lauren "LoLo" Spencer (who has muscular dystrophy) to Andraéa LaVant, one of the consultants who worked on Google's Accessible Marketing Playbook. In addition to ethnic diversity, Liu said, "it's great to see influential leaders in film using their platform to elevate disability representation in their community." **—R.K.**

MASTERCARD

Baran recalled. Liu could "sense when someone's body language didn't match the words they were saying.")

LOOKING WITHIN

Experiences like these, which Liu has amassed over the course of multiple tech jobs, form the core of her approach. If a company aims to credibly market itself to people with disabilities, Liu counsels, people with disabilities must have a seat at the decision-making table. Liu demonstrated as much not long after Google made her head of brand accessibility in January 2020.

Andraéa LaVant is a disability-focused communications consultant, and a woman of color who also uses a wheelchair. Her small firm, LaVant Consulting, found itself sitting at Google's table, thanks to Liu.

"She worked internally to make space for us," LaVant said. "And since then, our partnership with Google has flourished."

Liu said that before a brand even thinks about disability-inclusive marketing, it must take stock of its own house first.

"Brands need to look internally and see where they're at in their accessibility journey," she said. "Do you have disabled employees working at your company? And are you relying heavily on a small group of disabled employees to help you navigate this journey? That's not fair either. Brands need to do the work internally, just as Google did."

THE PLAYBOOK FOR DIVERSITY-INCLUSIVE MARKETING

The most vital product of that work is Google's Inclusive Marketing Playbook. The document lays out the essentials, and it pulls no punches. (Example: "Avoid 'inspiration porn,' e.g., celebrating disabled people for achievements that would be considered ordinary if the person didn't have a disability.")

Since its completion, the playbook has generated significant attention in the marketing community—not least because it's a bona fide chunk of Google's internal strategy that the company decided to share with anyone, competitors included. LaVant believes that the playbook has become "the standard that other companies are using." When it comes to disability-inclusive marketing, she added, "this is how you do it."

Though the playbook arose from collaborations among many groups both internal and external (including LaVant Consulting and Disability:IN), Twohill, who took the wraps off the monograph last year at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, credits Liu for her influence on it.

"We want to make sure that our work represents the multicultural and nuanced world we live in," said Twohill. "And it's not only about the work we put out, but who is behind the work. That's why having talented people like KR at the table is so important. It is testament to KR that we have made progress here."

As one might expect of a company like Google, that progress can be measured. When Liu joined the company, less than 1% of its creative work included people with disabilities. Within a year, Liu had helped push that figure up to 6%.

INFLUENCING A SHIFTING CULTURE

Liu's influence on Google is visible in its advertising. After the company released its Look to Speak app—which uses eye-gaze technology to allow people with motor impairments to send and receive messages—Liu helped with the creation of "A Look Can Say a Lot," a minutelong spot that featured Antoinette Fernandes, a woman with ALS, using the app.

Pleased as she is with this spot and with the playbook, however, Liu takes particular pride in "Child of a Deaf Adult" (CODA for short), which aired during the Academy Awards in 2022. The 90-second ad featured Google senior designer Tony Lee, who has the sense of hearing, narrating a story about his parents, who don't. As he explains: "I've always had one foot in the deaf world, and one in the hearing world."

When the pandemic made it impossible for Lee to communicate with his parents in person, Google's Live Caption technology—which typed out the spoken parts of the videos he sent to them—bridged that divide. The Academy Awards TV spot, which also showed Lee teaching his infant son sign language, deeply affected viewers. ("Give them an Oscar for that commercial," tweeted one.)

For Liu, this piece of creative work was "the stuff I've been hoping to see all these years." It wasn't just a branding score for Google, but something Liu considers more important still—messaging with the reach and power to change minds.

"Google is able to influence a shifting culture," she said. "Others are starting to see disability as a core part of their identity, not something that they feel ashamed of or hide."

JUST THE BEGINNING

Is that culture changing? It appears to be—slowly. Liu was especially heartened to see CODA—not the Google ad, but the Apple-financed movie with a predominantly deaf and hard of hearing cast—take home the Best Picture Oscar last year. Equally encouraging was Justina Miles' dynamic sign-language rendering of Rihanna's medley during February's Super Bowl Halftime Show.

"I used to never see a disabled person reflected in an authentic, positive way in advertising," Liu said. "And now look at what's happening."

With historically overlooked groups garnering ever more visibility, the inclusion of people with disabilities in corporate life—and corporate marketing—would have happened sooner or later. But Google's efforts have clearly helped accelerate the process. "We need more companies like Google," Houghton said, "to cause people to make more change." And Liu, LaVant believes, is a force driving the tech giant from within.

"It takes a particular type of person in [a company] as large as Google to be the one that is advocating, aiming to do it in an innovative way that is considerate of multiple perspectives and experiences, and then implementing that," LaVant said.

Liu hopes that the disability inclusion work that Google and a handful of other brands (see sidebar) have done will, over time, "create a whole new vertical ... where you have marketers and brands, storytellers and strategists thinking about this space."

In a sense, she added, they don't have a choice. "Everyone, at some point in their life, is going to experience disability. It's just going to happen," she said. "So we might as well be thinking about it now. I'm excited about the momentum. I think that will continue. But the brand has to keep doing the work."

'Brands need to look internally and see where they're at in their accessibility journey ... just as Google did.' -KR Liu

Why Google Went 'All In' On Inclusive Marketing

'We weren't getting it right,' until the company overhauled its strategy—and shared it with the whole industry.

GOOGLE

Google didn't get to be the world's most visited website by making mistakes. And that's much of why CMO Lorraine Twohill's 2022 address at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity (left; Liu joined remotely) was something of a needle-scratch moment. When it came to diversity in its marketing, Twohill admitted, Google had goofed.

"We weren't getting it right," the veteran marketing chief told her audience. In particular, she added, "we were very bad on darker skin tones, and we were leaning into stereotypes."

Google's first step in addressing these shortcomings came in 2021 with the launch of All In—also called the inclusive marketing tool kit—which focused largely on addressing populations of color. The Accessible Marketing Playbook (which is the disability component) was 2022's addition.

Though the timeline and semantics can be confusing, the main point—and Twohill's point—is that Google's marketing department was putting its house in order. And when Google does something, the knock-on effect is significant.

"Since launching All In, we've seen great engagement from the industry and have raised the bar in our own work, like our CODA spot and our Pixel campaigns, featuring Real Tone, allowing people with diverse skin tones to be better seen in photos," Twohill told Adweek. "The dollars behind the work matter, too. That's why we commit 15% of our major media campaign investments to diverse media."

The tech industry is hardly known for altruism, of course, and few marketers are in the habit of funding years of research only to hand it over to competitors. But Twohill insisted that "we want to share what we have learned" because, ultimately, it will "make marketing work better for everyone." **—R.K.**

ADWEEK

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› GLOBAL MEDIA AGENCY OF THE YEAR

PHOTO: AKIRA RUIZ

Initiative

(L. to r.): Jonathan Rigby, chief strategy officer; Sarah Robertson, global president, Rufus (Amazon-dedicated agency); Katy Varner, chief analytics officer; Paolo Sarno, chief growth officer; Nicole Estebanell, chief client officer; Kym Miller, chief experience officer; Stacy DeRiso, U.S. CEO; Dimitri Maex, global CEO; Maureen Bosetti, chief partnerships officer; Will Spence, chief operating officer; Stephanie Solomon, chief talent officer; Dana Thomas, chief communications design officer; Pele Cortizo-Burgess, chief culture and inclusion officer. **Not pictured:** Dan Tedesco, chief financial officer; David Stopforth, president, global client lead (Nike EMEA)

LANDING NIKE'S GLOBAL BUSINESS AND EXPANDING ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH AMAZON DISTINGUISHED THE IPG MEDIABRANDS AGENCY FROM RIVALS.

BY OLIVIA MORLEY

Much like management consultants lean on tried-and-true project frameworks to solve problems, so does the IPG Mediabrands agency Initiative. For several years, agency leaders called the agency's go-to approach Cultural Velocity. Last year, after elevating performance media expert Dimitri Maex to the global CEO role, Initiative rolled out a new, modified framework that replaced Cultural Velocity. The new concept, called Fame and Flow, helped secure the $450 million global Nike business.

Cultural Velocity and Fame and Flow are abstract, but clearly resonate with clients seeking to master the concepts. Media agencies are brand stewards, but aren't typically very good at branding themselves. Initiative, with its appealing frameworks, might be an exception.

The Nike pitch came hot on the heels of Initiative's $1.2 billion T-Mobile win in 2021. "What was really compelling is the the mental push that they put on us," said Kari Marshall, vice president of media for T-Mobile. "It wasn't about necessarily the buying power, which of course they had as a big agency, but really the mental push on strategically thinking about how to problem solve that was really interesting." It was on a winning streak, adding other significant brands to its roster, including Intuit ($180 million) and Ring ($100 million). Multiple global wins distinguished it from its agency peers, both within its holding company and the broader market.

It all culminated in Initiative securing the top spot on COMvergence's annual new business rankings list. Many factors contribute to new business wins—the way the agency markets itself, the amount of money it invests in presentation and the team it brings to the pitch—none of which prove the agency can or will do a good job. But Initiative kept all its clients last year, and the year before—even those up for review.

Initiative expanded its relationship with AWS, securing the brand's $200 million global digital business. It also retained Merck and Teva Pharmaceuticals globally, and Liberty Mutual in the U.S., tightening its hold on more than $1 billion in billings that could have gone elsewhere. It's unusual, given how many defending incumbents wind up losing the business, plus whatever money they invested in defending. Initiative doesn't just chase new accounts; it also nurtures and expands existing ones while leaning into frameworks like Fame and Flow, making it Adweek's 2023 Global Media Agency of the Year.

"We won a lot of business, but we outperformed every other agency on the defenses, which makes me super happy. It means that our clients are happy to stay with us," said Maex.

RETAINING EVERY CLIENT

The wins and successful client retention stoked Initiative's 2022 growth—up 26% in the U.S. and 19.3% globally from 2021. Revenue increased by 33%, and billings grew by 44% as Initiative expanded its Amazon Prime Video account in the MENA region and grew the AWS offline media business across the U.S., EMEA, APAC, Canada and LATAM markets.

After Maex took the top job, he brought an executive team from Reprise Digital along with him, including Jonathan Rigby, global chief strategy officer, Paolo Sarno, global chief growth officer and Melissa Gordon-Ring, global president, health.

The leadership moves signaled a new commitment to scaling performance media and commerce chops globally and turned out to be the crucial ingredient the agency needed. Sarno led the Nike pitch, while Gordon-Ring now serves the Merck and Teva Pharmaceuticals businesses.

FAME AND FLOW: GLOBAL SCALE AND DTC FOR NIKE

Agency holding companies vied for 10 months to win what was perhaps 2022's most high-profile media pitch: Nike's $450 million global business. The account had been at the top of Initiative's "wish list" since 2017, according to Maex. As far as he was concerned, Nike was a perfect match for Initiative. No other brand had as much inherent Cultural Velocity.

Cultural Velocity happens when a brand's ideals and influence shape culture. A brand can achieve Cultural Velocity by prompting societal change, rather than responding to it. The agency even published a book about the concept, authored by Initiative's former global chief strategy officer, Stefan Burford,

> We won a lot of business, but we outperformed every other agency on the defenses, which makes me super happy. It means that our clients are happy to stay with us.
>
> **DIMITRI MAEX, GLOBAL CEO, INITIATIVE**

and Wharton professor Jonah Berger.

As Burford and Berger wrote in the book, Nike achieved Cultural Velocity with its "Dream Crazy" spot featuring Colin Kaepernick.

The review was competitive: Nike had been working with GroupM agency Mindshare for almost a decade before the review, and it was the retailer's media agency when it launched "Dream Crazy."

Then, the brief arrived, surprising Maex. "It was a little bit of Cultural Velocity, but a lot of DTC," he recalled. "We had to change our formula a little bit."

Nike required a fully integrated media approach, ensuring earned, shared and paid channel strategies coalesced, instead of operating in silos. While the concept sounds intuitive, it is a complex challenge for a blue-chip brand spending millions on global marketing.

Initiative responded to the brief with an integrated organizational model called Blue Stream, which hinged on deep knowledge of performance media and commerce. Blue Stream taps into other Mediabrands agencies—namely, its Reprise Digital commerce unit (which Maex and his team previously led) and its Kinesso data arm. It's one example of how holding companies increasingly consolidate their offerings to deliver more to those clients seeking a one-stop shop with scale.

"You obviously have Initiative as a front door agency, and that's why we call it Blue Stream. But the trick has been to really integrate the capabilities of Reprise," Maex said. It invested a lot of energy to make the

INITIATIVE GLOBAL

KEY WINS:
111 new accounts and 13 retentions, including Nike, AWS, Intuit, Ring, European Parliament, ING, Ledger, ONCE, HelloFresh, EnergyAustralia, Luminus, Liberty Mutual (retention), Teva (retention), Destination Canada (retention and expansion), Travel Alberta (retention), Merck (retention)

LOSSES:
None

STRATEGIC MOVES:
The agency hired strategically, tapping an executive team from IPG Mediabrands' performance marketing agency, Reprise Digital. It revamped its custom approach to client work, shedding its Cultural Velocity strategy for a new strategy called Fame and Flow. It also embraced a group-led strategy in some instances, tapping sister companies Reprise Digital and Kinesso to craft custom solutions for companies like Nike.

REVENUE:
Initiative declined to reveal its revenue, but saw a 33% increase from 2021.

DEI:
Initiative's employee makeup is impressive relative to competitors. The numbers tell the story, which shows particularly strong gender equity: In the U.S., 65% of employees are women. They make up 61% of the creative department, 49% of staff at the management level and 64% of the executive team. Its commitment to hiring employees of color is also evident. Since 2020, Initiative's BIPOC talent has grown by 18% in the U.S., and last year, BIPOC accounted for more than half of new talent hired in the U.S.

Congrats to Starcom

on being Adweek's U.S. Media Agency of the Year.

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18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

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Brand new content
One site

AVXLIVE.ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open https://avxlive.icu

Key Campaigns

GILEAD SCIENCES

For its pharmaceutical client Gilead Sciences, Initiative turned its attention to HIV testing consideration in the South, where 51% of all new HIV cases occur. Initiative and Gilead targeted Black and Latinx communities across 11 Southern markets with low HIV testing rates to provide resources to men who have sex with men (MSMs) in those locales. The agency's audience insights established MSMs find comfort in sharing their experiences, but contend with a persistent fear of stigma. Given this, Initiative had to reach the MSM community discreetly, but effectively. It produced a hyper-local, Gilead-sponsored podcast series hosted by Zach Stafford called In The Deep, showcasing stories of people living with HIV. The agency partnered with iHeartRadio to advertise the podcast within a custom newsletter and digital, social and radio placements. The series received 444,000 downloads and had a 75% completion rate. It also drove real-life change. Its target audiences made 48,153 sexual health visits and took a combined 8,000 HIV tests, results that more than doubled Initiative's goal.

AMAZON PRIME VIDEO

To increase Season 3 viewership for Amazon Prime Video's series The Boys, Initiative was challenged with creating a winning campaign for the TV-MA show. "It's a really edgy show. It's culturally subversive, and we wanted the media to feel like that too," said Sarah Robertson, global president of Initiative's dedicated Amazon agency, Rufus. Initiative took a subversive approach that reengaged the existing fan base and intrigued new viewers, as opposed to one rooted in traditional entertainment marketing. The agency aired a series of NSFW trailers after 10 p.m. and events that included a NSFW Las Vegas party showcasing 3D-printed dildos."The content pushes the envelope, and that gave us permission to do the same with the media," Robertson said. The campaign had global reach. Easter-egg-filled Twitch spots premiered in Brazil, while a Spotify quiz for Canadian viewers matched them with the show character they're most like. The campaign catapulted the third season to become Amazon Prime Video's most-watched show, as The Boys' worldwide viewership grew 17% from Season 2, and 234% from Season 1.

ITAÚ

The Argentina bank Itaú wielded a relatively small budget compared to other large financial institutions it competed with. Despite this, it endeavored to attract 200,000 new Gen Z customers. To do it, it brought banking to where its customers already were. Young Argentinians, Initiative estimated, spend an average of 9 hours every day on WhatsApp. To take advantage of that, Itaú integrated its digital banking solution with the social media app. To help the bank convert the Gen Z audience, Initiative created custom content for the MTV Millennial Awards. It enlisted TikTok and Twitch influencers to reach young consumers—many who'd never banked before. The campaign surpassed Initiative's goal by five times, driving a million new accounts and increasing Itaú's perception as an innovative bank by 31 points.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GILEAD SCIENCES, AMAZON PRIME VIDEO AND ITAÚ

integrated workflow seamless, the CEO told Adweek, including investing in process mapping and tapping external consultants.

To account for Nike's two-pronged need, Initiative developed Fame and Flow.

Fame, synonymous with traditional brand marketing, amplifies the brand's salience and reach, making its benefits obvious to consumers. The agency can achieve it by making a project go viral or become difficult to forget. Flow, synonymous with integrated performance marketing, is about "the movement of people across the path to purchase and how you use experience design, media content—whatever the right mix is—to help with that," Maex said.

A Fame and Flow approach means Nike's brand and performance marketing initiatives operate together, and seamlessly. "I come from a performance background, and performance marketing done well uses creativity, uses utility; it removes friction from the entire customer experience," Maex said.

INTERNAL METRICS INDICATE PROGRESS

Initiative's framework-oriented approach extends beyond the client work. The agency either has a framework or tool in place for any task, or else it will build one.

One project currently in development will help Initiative vet prospective clients' climate impact and avoid those that don't meet its standards. Agencies that entertain relationships with fossil fuel clients face scrutiny, prompting many to reassess the brands they engage with. Another tool set to launch soon will calculate any ad's carbon emissions to keep media planners aware of their campaign strategies' environmental impact.

"The clients are looking for guidance on where to show up, and the right partners. We've created frameworks bespoke to key clients with the hope that it will be common practice for all of our clients, as we help guide them on the DEI journey that they're going through," said Pele Cortizo-Burgess, Initiative's chief culture and inclusion officer.

The agency maintains its Media Responsibility Index (MRI)—a database cataloging more than 200 media partners—which integrates with Initiative's global channel planning tool, Ripple. That, alongside another bespoke tool, Balance, helps planners redistribute campaign investments in diverse-owned channels, or invest in partners that can help them achieve sustainability goals.

"Every decision that you make within media can either close a gap or widen one," Cortizo-Burgess said.

Initiative's encouraging internal metrics indicate progress toward closing gaps. Its workforce is 65% female, comprising 61% of its creative department. Since 2020, it's grown BIPOC talent by 18% in the U.S. and increased female representation by 10% at the global executive level and by 43% within its U.S. creative function. Its U.S. executive leadership team is 64% women and 36% men. Last year, talent identifying as BIPOC accounted for half of the agency's U.S. hires.

Unusual recruitment campaigns also aided the agency. Initiative welcomed friends to apply to work at the agency together, launching recruitment campaigns called "You + a Friend" and "Getting the Band Back Together." "We launched on Valentine's Day. Get it?" Cortizo-Burgess said. Of the 362 people that applied for open positions, Initiative hired five pairs of work "besties."

Underpinning its uniquely diverse workforce and recruitment strategy is Initiative's low 17% global attrition rate. Compared to the advertising industry's average rate of about 30%, it backs up an assumption that should be intuitive to more agencies: Happier employees lead to bigger wins.

BEST BUY | Best Buy. Ads | Starcom

Congratulations Starcom, cheers to you!

From one relationship-based agency to another, congratulations to our exceptional partners at **Starcom** on the honor of being named Adweek's 2023 U.S. Media Agency of the Year!

› U.S. MEDIA AGENCY OF THE YEAR

PHOTO: STARCOM

Starcom

Top row (L. to r.): Lala Steele, Karla Knecht, Kim Einan, Meghan O'Keefe, Willie Jackson, Kristin Haarlow, Diane Harrison, Robert Schwartz
Bottom row (L. to r.): Michael Epstein, Britany Rickett, Maureen Glure, Carlos Sanchez, Ariti Bhansali

THE CHICAGO-BASED SHOP ADDED MCDONALD'S AND AB INBEV, REJUVENATED ITS LEADERSHIP TEAM AND BUILT ON ITS EXISTING HERITAGE CLIENT BUSINESSES.

BY KYLE O'BRIEN

For decades, heritage media agencies grew in power by managing clients' buys on television, radio and print. But to stay on top of 2023's omnichannel world, a media agency must be able to see the entire media map, locate every consumer on it and navigate it like a trailblazer. Starcom comes from heritage—it traces its roots back to the 1940s as Leo Burnett Media and became Starcom in 1999—but now is in lockstep with modern integrated trends.

And often it's ahead of them, helping its long-tenured clients and new ones alike with Publicis Power of One-fueled cutting edge media technology and data.

But technology alone does not make a great agency. The Publicis media shop also brings decades of experience, know-how of the creative process and a decent dose of humanity to its clients that include mainstays like the Kellogg Company and Best Buy, as well as newer additions McDonald's, AB InBev and Aldi.

Some client relationships date back to the Leo Burnett Media days, including Kellogg's, but Starcom has evolved over the past couple of years, bumping its profile beyond its heritage clients to grab major players.

Those clients are loyal to Starcom and appreciate the way the agency values its partnerships. They tout Starcom's push for constant improvement, the agency's commitment to its partners and its ability to see the big picture and make changes when and where necessary—which is why Adweek has named Starcom its U.S. Media Agency of the Year. Starcom's new business boomed in 2022, with $357.9 million in total net new business results, according to COMvergence.

"I get to continuously see from Starcom and their leadership a commitment to continuous performance improvement in spirit of our partnership. They're excellent at hearing us, adapting, adjusting and addressing kind of whatever the needs are," said Julie Bowerman, chief marketing officer at the Kellogg Company.

AN INFUSION OF ENERGY

There's a can-do attitude in the Midwest, and Starcom, with most of its people based in Chicago, embodies that hard-working, nonsense posture.

"Maybe because they were born in the Midwest, this company has a different perspective than the anchor New York City-based agencies," said Diane Harrison, chief talent officer.

Since 2021, Starcom has rejuvenated its leadership team with fresh perspectives. Global and U.S. CEO Michael Epstein—formerly CEO of Dentsu's Carat, where he was named Adweek's media executive of the year, leads the group after joining Starcom in June 2021. His new executive group is made up of Starcom veterans and newcomers, including chief strategy officer Kim Einan, chief client officer Maureen Glure, chief investment officer Kristin Haarlow, chief operating officer Karla Knecht and chief marketing officer Robert Schwartz.

Epstein's knowledge and work in digital transformation made him a desirable pick for Starcom, and he has not disappointed in his time, pushing the agency forward while integrating Publicis' digital tools to create even greater success. He also found Starcom a bit insular with a management structure that wasn't streamlined properly, and he helped move people into the right positions to maximize their impact.

Einan, who has been with Starcom for almost 24 years, said that Epstein's hiring was a huge momentum driver because he is an advocate for change and modernization.

Epstein has also helped update Starcom's products, embracing Publicis' digital tools from Epsilon and Sapient, letting CSO Einan build out an insights practice, allowing Haarlow to concentrate on investments and getting Starcom to think more about DEI and its business advantages.

"If you understand segments better, you can change the way you go to market better," Epstein said.

Strategy is a big part of Starcom's success, and that has led to Einan's development of the insights department, which she said will help bolster Starcom's reputation.

"Strategy includes insights, which is really about identifying the right people opportunity, the right business opportunity, in the context of the right cultural opportunity," said Einan, adding that the agency has taken a strong point of view about what a brand should—and should not—do with media, content and creative.

TRANSFORMING BUSINESS FOR CLIENTS

With a partnership dating back 70 years, Kellogg's and Starcom have gone through periods of reinvention as business needs have changed. The team is currently helping the brand as it prepares to split into three separate companies.

"They came to us as a very tenured partner to help take them through that transformation, looking at how we can help serve each of those individual companies in a very unique and different way based on the challenges that they were facing," said Glure, adding that Starcom expanded its remit to bring in some of Kellogg's omnicommerce business and work with external partners.

Epstein added that some of Starcom's key clients are going through massive transformations, but the client base has remained stable with little turnover.

Key Campaigns

MCDONALD'S
Last October, McDonald's leaned into the nostalgia around enjoying a Happy Meal and partnered with hot streetwear brand Cactus Plant Flea Market to reimagine the experience for adults. Starcom created a media experience fueled by Gen Z's desire for authentic self-expression and access to the exclusive trends at the forefront of drop culture. A digital-led strategy captured trendsetters and McDonald's customers and included an AR experience on Snap where scanning the Happy Meal box transported fans to a world of CPFM collectibles. McDonald's sold out within the first few days of the promotion, and it helped drive the highest weekly digital transactions ever for the U.S. business.

CHEEZ-IT
Kellogg's brand Cheez-It needed to address an underperforming segment in younger millennials. The brand and agency built a plan based on a Swiss study that found that aging cheese to the sounds of hip-hop enhances its flavor, using the idea to bake up a limited-edition Cheez-It. Partnering with Pandora, the brand curated a hip-hop playlist that the cheese listened to nonstop. Starcom and the brand negotiated a $500,000 asset exchange with Pandora, as well as a partnership with hip-hop personality Sway Calloway from SiriusXM to create a YouTube series "Living Legendz." By creatively dropping Cheez-It into hip-hop culture, the brand engaged younger millennials. The effort had more than 448 million earned media impressions, and visits to the Cheez-It website spiked 1,900%.

KRAFT HEINZ
To connect with millennial consumers, Kraft Heinz partnered with Alpha Precision Media to create "5GRV Gamers on the Road," a series that featured three female gamers and a comedic host as they hit the road for a 10-day adventure to the 2022 DreamHack gaming festival in Atlanta. Along for the ride were Velveeta and Kraft Mayo making stops at seven different HBCUs in an effort to promote inclusivity in gaming. Livestreamed on Twitch, Kraft Heinz achieved strong engagement with 97,000 minutes watched on Twitch with viewers per stream 38% higher than the Twitch average. Paid media delivered 19 million impressions. Publicis Media's APX Content Ventures helped bring the brands together.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MCDONALD'S, CHEEZ-IT AND KRAFT HEINZ

KUDOS TO YOU.

Congratulations to our media partner *Initiative*, Adweek's Global Media Agency of the Year.

INTUIT quickbooks

> “Our teams and our leadership [have] not been afraid to embrace the changes [clients are] going through and help them in the ways that we can.”
>
> **MICHAEL EPSTEIN, GLOBAL AND U.S. CEO, STARCOM**

STARCOM U.S.

KEY WINS:
McDonald’s, AB InBev, Aldi, Frontier Communications, Kellogg’s omnicommerce, AB InBev social

LOSSES:
Lionsgate, Planet Fitness (resigned)

STRATEGIC MOVES:
Executive hires and promotions include Kim Einan, chief strategy officer; Maureen Glure, chief client officer; Kristin Haarlow, chief investment officer; Diane Harrison, chief talent officer; Karla Knecht, chief operating officer; Robert Schwartz, chief marketing officer

REVENUE:
Publicis Groupe will not provide annual revenue estimates. In 2022, Starcom's total revenue grew more than 7%. In Recma’s most recent new business activity report, Starcom grew more than 20% in 2022. The agency has won more than $1.5 billion in new business since December 2021, according to COMvergence.

DEI:
Starcom hired 400 new employees in 2022, and roughly 40% are people of color. The agency also has a summer internships program and a future leaders program that looks to hire from underrepresented groups. The company is working with Historically Black Colleges and Universities as well.

“Our teams and our leadership [have] not been afraid to embrace the changes they’re going through and help them in the ways that we can,” said Epstein.

Starcom’s partnership with Best Buy dates back 15 years, and the agency recently helped the retailer develop its ecommerce chops during the pandemic. According to Keith Bryan, president of Best Buy ads, media and CRM, the relationship between the two companies is “very reciprocal, not a transactional one,” because of Starcom’s ability to think critically and strategically about Best Buy’s business and understand its customers.

“Starcom has helped us, whether in crisis, like the pandemic, or whether in deliberative transformation,” said Bryan. “They take great interest in our customer journey; they help us solve complicated problems around measurement.”

GRABBING THE BIG BURGER

While long-term clients are foundational for any agency, landing big wins keeps agencies growing, and one of the largest gets over the past year came when McDonald’s consolidated its media buying with Starcom after a two-decade partnership with Omnicom media shop OMD USA.

McDonald’s had already entrusted Starcom with its loyalty program, but with the consolidation, McDonald’s got a partner that added the depth of Epsilon and Sapient along with the media savvy of Starcom to create a true CRM business strategy, said Tariq Hassan, McDonald’s U.S. CMO.

According to Hassan, Starcom’s work on McDonald’s grew the brand’s loyalty program and app to roughly 40 million users, and then leverages them once they’re on the app. In addition, Starcom is able to utilize its data and insights and feed it to agency Wieden+Kennedy for creative success.

During a Quarter Pounder program, Starcom found data for people who hadn’t tried the sandwich yet, then leveraged that data to gain insights into the consumer that made its way into the creative brief.

“Being able to start with that mindset upfront around customer data and customer signals that they could see, apply that to the creative and then turn around and apply that back to the actual application of the media plan proved to be incredibly [helpful],” said Hassan.

What makes Starcom work is the team’s thorough understanding of its partners from a business perspective, and its investment in those relationships.

McDonald’s noted that Starcom takes advantage of investment opportunities for its clients because they also see the growth opportunities for themselves, which makes for a great shared partnership.

“They’re carrying that broader business strategy mindset,” said Hassan. “When you get a partner who understands your business goals, not just your marketing goals, that’s the formula for great success.”

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Initiative

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CONGRATULATIONS ON THIS RESOUNDING SUCCESS.

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BREAKTHROUGH MEDIA AGENCY OF THE YEAR

PHOTO: GALE

Gale

(L. to r.): Max Germain, vp, biddable; Linda Platt, svp, integrated direct investment and media planning; Brad Simms, president and CEO; Sophia Zhang, managing director; Brad Nunn, vp, biddable

THE STAGWELL SHOP'S MEDIA ARM PUTS ITS CONSULTING WORK INTO PRACTICE, DEFTLY BLENDING DATA, CREATIVITY AND VELOCITY. BY JAMESON FLEMING

Ten years ago, Gale did not exist.

Five years ago, the Stagwell-owned agency did not have a media practice.

And last year, it delivered a billion dollars in media billings and scored nine-figure revenue, growing at an astonishing 133% year over year.

While Gale was shortlisted for Adweek's 2022 U.S. Agency of the Year award—which honors creative agencies—and is the winner of Adweek's Breakthrough Media Agency of the Year, its story is not as an integrated agency.

It's in, as Gale CEO and president Brad Simms calls it, a new class of shops: a business agency. Gale is nestled in a little pocket between traditional agencies mired in decades of ingrained structures trying to adapt to today's landscape and consultancies racing to add creative arms to complement their strategic practices.

"I find them just well built for today for this integration of agility, data and creativity all moving together with velocity," said Yin Woon Rani, CEO, MilkPEP. "It's just somehow easier to work with an agency that was built to compete in today's reality, versus agencies that are sometimes dealing with a little bit of a legacy mindset."

The agency blends a number of core capabilities together—creative, digital and PR, as well as data and technology—but the catalyst that puts all of that work into practice is its media-buying arm. It's the fastest-growing unit within the agency and now accounts for approximately half of the agency's $120 million in revenue.

Gale strives to act not as a traditional agency, but first and foremost as a business partner that solves real business problems and truly functions as an extension of the client.

"Our competitors are less so the traditional agencies who are trying to move into the space and more so the consultancies," said Sophia Zhang, managing director and business lead at Gale. "We built this agency from day one on this idea that we need to bring consultation, consultative, advisory plus creativity to all the clients that we work with."

> We spent five years mastering the craft in the dark and are just now showing we've got scale, clients and results.
>
> **BRAD SIMMS, PRESIDENT AND CEO, GALE**

BECOMING A MEDIA SHOP

When Simms, who is also the CEO of CP+B, founded Gale in 2014 with a grand total of seven employees, the agency didn't tackle media buying. It wasn't until four years into the journey that the agency made the leap into media to back its consulting business.

"We realized that 90% of [clients'] marketing budget was going to media," Zhang said. "And if we didn't actually have control over that, there's nothing that we could have done from a consultation perspective that could have influence on what was happening downstream."

The agency found itself hearing from its clients' CEOs, who were frustrated that their media agency didn't understand their business and relied largely on vanity metrics that didn't drive business outcomes.

"So we needed to actually get into media to help drive our clients' business forward in service of our consulting," Zhang said.

DELIVERING BUSINESS OUTCOMES

Simms, who also serves as the Stagwell Brand Performance Network chief product officer, takes a hands-on approach with clients to ensure the agency is on the same page, laser-

GALE BREAKTHROUGH

KEY WINS:
15 new clients, including Dropbox (global media), Lumos (integrated marketing), Hertz (global data and CRM), Zappos (loyalty/CRM)

LOSSES:
Cadre

STRATEGIC MOVES:
Launched innovation practice called Advance Party; added PR and influencer specialties; Stagwell introduced Gale's integrated model as the blueprint for Stagwell's Brand Performance Network.

REVENUE:
$120 million, which is a 130% increase from 2021

DEI:
Hired Jesse Perez as its first director of people, inclusion and experience. The agency is undergoing a 2023 fair pay review executed by Fair Pay Workplace to ensure equitable compensation across the company.

Here’s to you, Initiative.
An industry disruptor that’s turning heads in the media world.

You help us stand out in a sea of sameness and pave new ways to success for our organization. And now you’ve done the same for yours. Congratulations, Initiative, on being named Global Media Agency of the Year. Well done.

THE CIGNA GROUP

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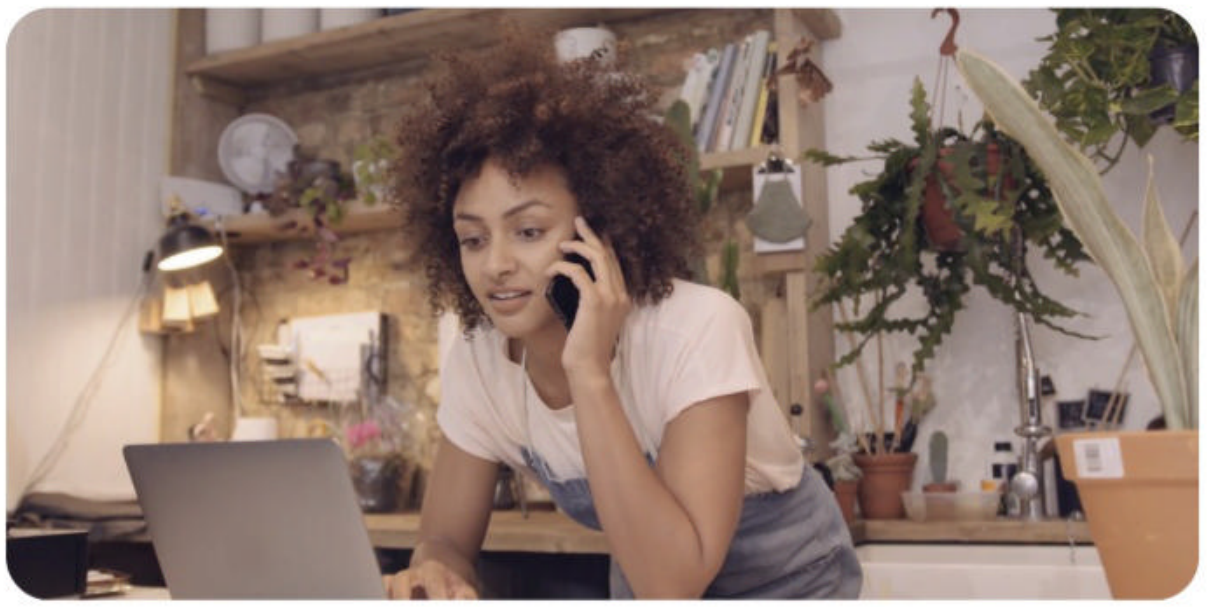
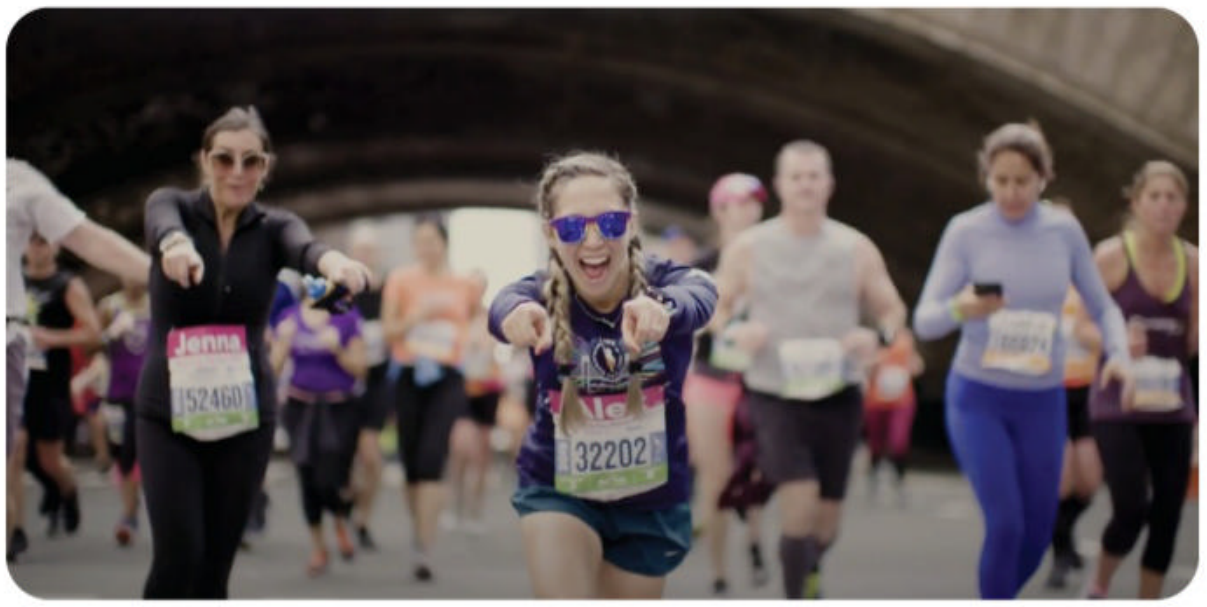
Key Campaigns

H&R BLOCK
Gale paired its database of 275 million households with H&R Block's first-party data to develop 12 different audience profiles that are based on potential value of the customer. It created custom messaging and tracked when customers were searching for tax services in order to target them at the precise moments they were likely to pick a company to do their taxes. It used pricing data to capitalize on a 10-day period in which it had a price advantage on a top competitor by significantly increasing its media spend. In an industry with nearly 100% awareness but little loyalty, Gale's work helped drive a 10% increase in revenue.



MILKPEP
With just 7% of $30 billion in sports sponsorships going to women, MilkPEP used the NYC Marathon to put out an open call to sponsor runners in the race. More than 3,500 women signed up, and MilkPEP matched their race fees with donations to Girls on the Run, raising $600,000 for the organization. MilkPEP captured photos of its new spokeswomen and turned those images into OOH ads across New York celebrating their success in the marathon. The campaign drove nearly $12 million in earned media. When Gale pitched the concept, it had just 80 days to complete the execution.



OLD DOMINION
Using audience modeling, Gale developed not just areas and industries to target but also high-value individual targets for Old Dominion. This led the agency down a path to a high-profile sponsorship with ESPN College Football GameDay and stadium placements across 36 sports stadiums. Gale also executed marketing to drive recruitment for the brand, helping reduce open jobs by 90%. In 2022, the brand grew revenue by 29% and net profit by 44%.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF H&R BLOCK, MILKPEP AND OLD DOMINION

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Perspective

THE LOGO
The three agitos ('I move' in Latin) embody motion and feature the three colors most common in the flags of nations.

The Paralympics

HOW SOME PARALYZED WWII VETERANS AND A VISIONARY DOCTOR GAVE RISE TO A GLOBAL ATHLETIC MOVEMENT.
BY ROBERT KLARA

THE EVENT
This is the men's 400-meter final in T54, a classification for those with spinal cord injuries who have impeded or eliminated leg function.

THE FIELD
Tokyo hosted the Summer Olympics and Paralympics in 2021, erecting the National Stadium for the purpose.

One early morning in the English town of Aylesbury, a doctor in round spectacles and a white lab coat began his usual rounds at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. These were the dreary days immediately following World War II, and the hospital—which took in soldiers paralyzed from shrapnel injuries—was only a little less dreary. But that morning, the neurologist caught sight of something that would soon change history.

Gathered on the lawn, some of Dr. Ludwig Guttmann's paraplegic patients were swatting a puck around with inverted walking canes. "Wheelchair polo," they called it.

Guttmann was already a pioneer in treating spinal injuries by prescribing physical activity over bed rest. But the neurologist's own patients opened his eyes to a larger idea: that physical therapy in the form of competitive sport wouldn't just build the confidence of the players but would also become a movement unto itself.

The 1948 Stoke Mandeville Games had a modest beginning: 16 veterans playing archery. But by 1960, the competition had expanded to eight sports, drawing 400 athletes from 23 countries. It also had a new name: the Paralympics.

Today, the Paralympics are as well-known as their older cousin, the Olympics. But their strides have been comparatively recent. In 1980, Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev—who'd been happy to host the Summer Olympics in Moscow—turned away the Paralympics. "In our country," he announced, "there are no disabled people." Fast-forward to 2021, and the Summer Paralympics in Tokyo drew 4,403 athletes to compete in 22 events in front of an audience of 14 million.

"Society has evolved," the International Paralympic Committee's chief brand officer Craig Spence told Adweek. "Although a massive amount still needs to be done to drive inclusion for the word's 1.2 billion persons with disabilities, there is no question that some progress has been made in the last five decades."

Progress, yes—and also some shrewd marketing. In 2001, the IPC formalized an agreement with the International Olympic Committee that both Olympics and Paralympics would take place in the same host cities, an automatic pairing that "led to an exponential growth in spectator numbers and TV audiences," Spence said.

Equally critical was a 2018 agreement by which top-tier corporate sponsors of the Olympics automatically became primary sponsors of the Paralympics, too. That deal has since seen multinationals like P&G, Toyota and Visa put their considerable heft behind the Games.

Despite these changes, individual para athletes have yet to see the lucrative sponsorships of their Olympian counterparts.

Nonetheless, one can only imagine Dr. Guttmann marveling at what his Stoke Mandeville Games have become. In 2012, the late neurologist's daughter Eva Loeffler—herself a physiotherapist—attended the London Paralympics. "I just hope he's up there, watching it all," she said.

THEY COME TO PLAY

For the 2012 Paralympics, London set a new standard by building the fully accessible Stratford transport hub (1), which included train platforms with minimal gaps. The Paralympics feature a huge variety of sports (six in the winter and 22 in summer) and athletes who devote their lives to training, though they may never become household names. Shown here are Egyptian table tennis star Ibrahim Elhusseiny Hamadtou (2) and downhill standing para alpine skiing great Hiraku Misawa of Japan (3).

ATHLETIC COMPETITION, SAID DR. GUTTMANN, 'RESTORES PLEASURE IN LIFE.'

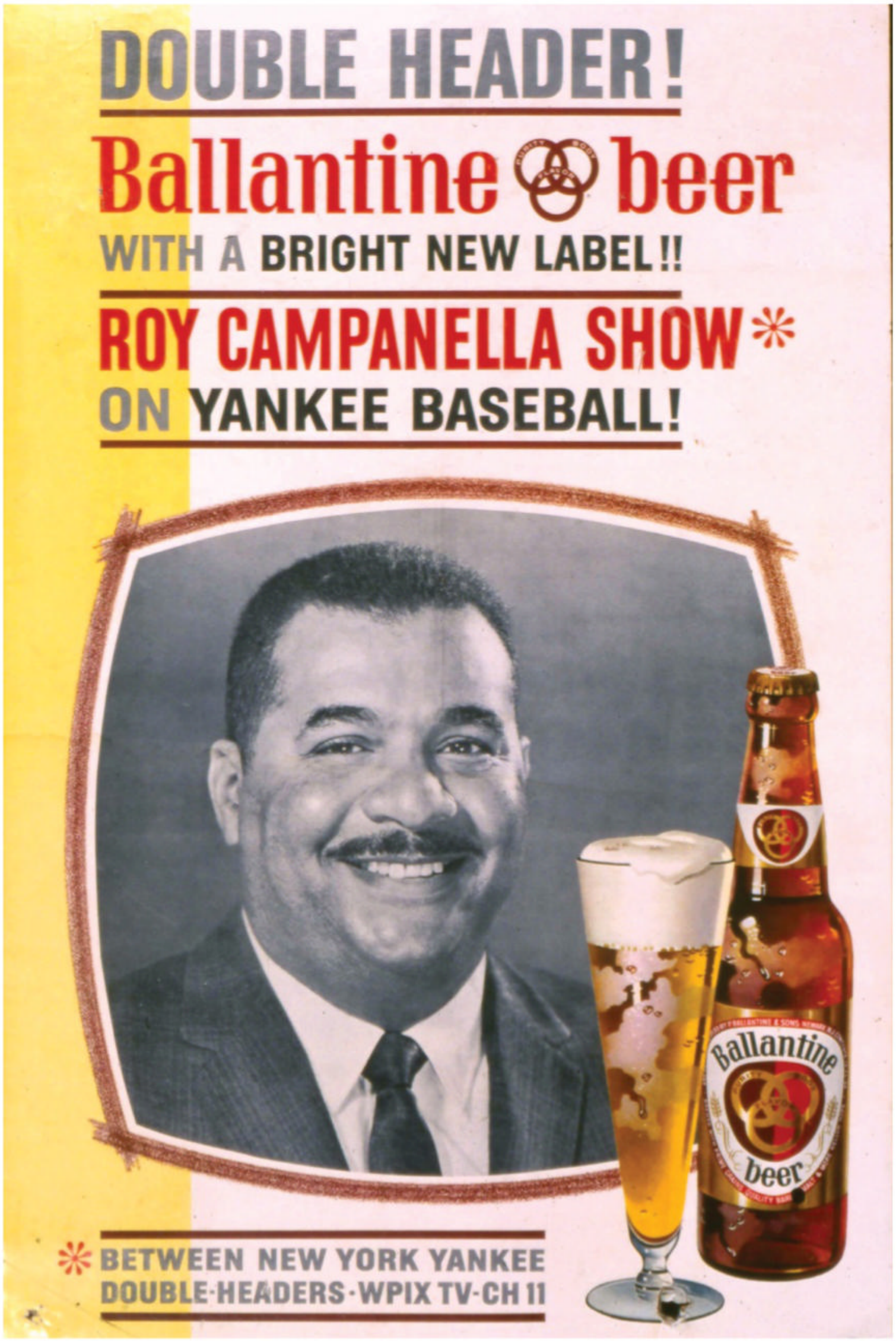
CAN SPORTS REALLY CHANGE PERCEPTIONS?

In addition to bringing the Paralympics to a global stage, the IPC recently broadened its mission to make the world itself more inclusive. How can a cluster of sporting events accomplish a task as daunting as that? As "the biggest showcase of disability on the planet," Spence said, the Paralympics have "a profound impact" on governments, corporations and the public. He cites the 2012 Games in London as an example, which spurred the city to increase the accessibility of facilities like hotels and train stations. One survey found that 83% of Channel 4's viewers believed that the TV coverage had improved public attitudes toward disabled people. According to IPC research, companies had hired a million more people with disabilities by 2018 than were employed prior to the Games.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

A pioneer in the rehabilitation of veterans with spinal cord injuries, Dr. Ludwig Guttmann (1) began staging the Stoke Mandeville Games in the late 1940s (2), an event that grew into the Paralympics. The nadir of Paralympics history came in 1980, when Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev refused to host the Games, insisting that the USSR had 'no disabled people.'

PREVIOUS PAGE: OIS/IOC; OIS/IOC; STANLEY CHOU/GETTY IMAGES; 1, 2. RAYMOND KLEBOE/PICTURE POST/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; 3. WALLY MCNAMEE/CORBIS/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES



1960

Campy's Triple Play

On a late January night in 1958, Brooklyn Dodgers catcher Roy Campanella lost control of his Chevrolet on an icy road, flipping the car and crushing his spinal cord. The accident would leave him paralyzed from the waist down, ending a brilliant career in an instant. Campanella, however, was already famous for more than his playing. When Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947, Campanella was right behind him, signing with the Dodgers the following year. Campanella broke through advertising's color line, too, endorsing brands like Coca-Cola and Gillette razors. Then, in 1960, he made history once again—this time as a TV host who used a wheelchair. That summer, WPIX debuted the Roy Campanella Show—better known as Campy's Corner—underwritten by Ballantine Beer. Scheduled between Yankees doubleheaders, the program featured Campanella riffing on the plays he'd just seen on the field. Campanella might not have been able to play anymore, but the magic of broadcasting had put him behind home plate once again.

—Robert Klara

TRANSCENDENTAL GRAPHICS/GETTY IMAGES

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